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**Joseph Daniel Shaw**

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The Thesis committee for Joseph Daniel Shaw

Certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

**The Cosmic Challenger:**  
**What American Evangelicals Think About Islam and Why**

**APPROVED BY**

**SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

**Supervisor:** \_\_\_\_\_

Hina Azam

\_\_\_\_\_

Josh Busby

**The Cosmic Challenger:**

**What American Evangelicals Think About Islam and Why**

by

**Joseph Daniel Shaw, B.A.**

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**The Cosmic Challenger:**  
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by

Joseph Daniel Shaw, M.P.Aff.; MA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2009

SUPERVISOR: Hina Azam

This thesis answers the question, "What do twenty-first century American evangelical Christians think about Islam and why do they think that way?" The dominant perception of these Christians is that Islam is a cosmic challenger to Christianity. In other words, Islam and Christianity are in an existential competition to win souls. This thesis utilizes perceptions of Islam as the analytical reference point by which to better understand American evangelicals. The driving hypothesis is that some things about what and why evangelicals think about Islam will reveal broader conclusions about evangelicals themselves. Evangelical Christian literature is broken down into four classifications: informational, prophetic, apologetic, and missional. In the end, consideration of Islam and Muslims leads evangelicals to either an activist impulse or missional impulse.

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## **CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION**

At the broadest level, this thesis contributes to the literature on Christian-Muslim relations. This is a growing field of inquiry and one that has far reaching implications for both academia and international policy. Geopolitical approaches to Christian-Muslim relations are the most common, which comes as no surprise in the post September 11, 2001 era. Sociological and religious studies also contribute to scholarship on this subject. There is, though, negligible scholarship on how evangelical Christians think about Islam. Reasons for this are many: western scholars writing on Christian-Muslim relations are more concerned with what Muslims think about Christians than visa versa; understanding evangelical Christian thought on Islam mandates acquaintance with a variety of scholarly approaches spanning geopolitics, religious studies, history, and sociology; lastly, the interplay between Islam and terrorism has disproportionately held Western scholarly attention in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This thesis is an attempt to fill this research gap; it is a direct analysis of contemporary American evangelical Christian thought on Islam. My research question is “What do evangelicals think about Islam and why do they think that way?” The purpose of this paper is, first, to provide substantive data analysis of post 9/11 American evangelical thought on Islam in a way that can be reproduced and analyzed in the years to come. This research is original and basically unprecedented. Therefore, it should be taken as a first step in understanding the broad implications of evangelical thought on Islam. Without understanding of the nuances of evangelical thought on Islam, one may only speculate as to the ways in which evangelical thought on Islam influences policy making.

Secondly, this paper sheds new light on American evangelicals as a demographic unit of analysis.

This study utilizes perceptions of Islam as the analytical reference point by which to better understand evangelicals. I am not concerned about whether what evangelicals think about Islam is actually accurate or morally appropriate as much as how evangelicals cognitively process the idea of “Islam” and “Muslims”. My hypothesis, therefore, is that some things about what and why evangelicals think about Islam will reveal broader conclusions about evangelicals themselves.

In the end, I find that Islam tremendously perplexes evangelicals. They are perplexed sociologically: Muslims are an unfamiliar people and culture for most evangelicals. It takes time and concentration to learn about them – to know them. Evangelicals are perplexed linguistically: Islam brings new terms to learn (*jihad*, *shari’ah*, *da’wah*, and so on) and new cultural artifacts to appreciate (prostrate prayer, fasting, and so on). Most of all, Islam perplexes evangelicals existentially. In the evangelical mind, Islam is the ultimate cosmic rival to Christianity. This leads to tremendous fret or fervor, depending on one’s theological orientation. Those who fret often believe in eschatological paradigms that foretell of the great enemy of Christianity that will rise to power in the End Times to wage one final war against the Kingdom of God. In the mind of many Christians, Islam is this enemy. This fretting contributes to an “activist impulse”. Those who grow in fervor often focus on the missional calling of the church. Irrespective of Islam’s role in the End Times, God has called His people to love and evangelize Muslims in word and deed. This is what I call a “missional impulse”. The

activist and missional impulses are distinct and influential in determining how evangelicals, both individually and corporately, respond to Islam and Muslims.

## **Structure**

In terms of structure, this thesis flows from analysis of major to minor themes and, finally, to analysis of how these themes are manifest in evangelical activity. Chapter 2 answers a preliminary matter, how do evangelicals answer the question, “Why is Islam relevant?” How they answer this question reveals the core of evangelical concern about Islam, namely, that demographic changes within the Muslim world and the West point to clear advances against Christianity and western civilization. Chapter 3 is the most data intensive section of this thesis. This chapter presents a new taxonomy of evangelical literature on Islam. To be clear, the literature in this chapter is the data under observation. My conclusions are thematic and representative of general evangelical thought. This thesis is fundamentally a descriptive analysis of evangelical thought; with the exception of my final reflection in the conclusion, I have strayed from commenting on the preciseness or moral appropriateness of evangelical thought on Islam. I have classified the literature into four groups: informational, prophetic, apologetic, and missional. Chapter 4 highlights the main theme within evangelical thought on Islam, namely, that Islam is a cosmic challenger to Christianity. Evangelicals overwhelmingly believe that there is a global “Islamic agenda” for world domination. They establish this idea of an Islamic agenda through citing Muslim initiatives in the West as well as the ancient origins of the rivalry between Christianity and Islam. The clash between Islam and



Christianity is practical and existential. This clash extends into Islam-West relations. Chapter 5 highlights the minor themes within evangelical thought on Islam. The chapter concludes with a case study of one set of events that drew out evangelical voices on Islam into the public square in an unprecedented way. Chapter 6 comes back to the taxonomy of thought and shows that the overlaps in the taxonomy actually point to certain impulses within evangelicalism that drive evangelical activity towards Islam and Muslims. Chapter 7, the conclusion, overviews the main points of this thesis and ends with a brief reflection on broader Christian-Muslim relations.

## **Methodology**

For the last three years, I have directed an evangelical Christian adult education course on Islam in Austin, Texas. I have personally observed over 250 evangelical Christian adults learn about Islam, and have fielded many of their questions. Throughout these three years, I began to observe certain themes, explicit and implicit, in how my students were thinking about Islam. It seemed to me that they were all asking similar questions, they were fascinated with the same material, and that many of them had the same concerns and preconceived ideas about Islam. Engaging other evangelical adults on the topic of Islam, I became interested in popular thought on Islam, over and above evangelical academic analysis of Islam.

I conducted a literature review of ninety-eight books on Islam published for the popular American evangelical audience since 2001. The year 2001 is significant because of the terrorist attacks on 9/11-01. I use 9/11 as a general benchmark for the

contemporary period. There has been much speculation as to how 9/11 affected the way the world thinks about Islam and Muslims. Though it is not its main purpose, this paper sheds light on how the events of 9/11 affected evangelical thought on Islam.

I assembled my source list of books using a combination of Amazon.com lists and bibliographic citations found in articles, blogs and books, and from personal referrals. I have humble confidence that I have surveyed at least 95% of American evangelical books written on Islam since 9/11. In terms of book selection, I chose only evangelical Christian books on Islam. The following was my selection criteria for books: first, the book must be for an American evangelical Christian audience. Secondly, the book itself must demonstrate, at least partly, evangelical characteristics.<sup>1</sup> Thirdly, the book must be published or re-published from 2001 onward.

Obviously, evangelicals get their information from a multitude of sources. The internet makes tracking the lineage of thought exceptionally difficult. This challenge increases exponentially with time.

But as this thesis shows, evangelical books still strongly influence the shaping of evangelical thought on Islam. This is due to two reasons. First, evangelical Christians want to know what they are “supposed” to think about Islam, from a religious point of view. Therefore, they often defer to the works of evangelical Christian pundits and

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<sup>1</sup> David W. Bebbington's list of evangelicalism's characteristics have become standard. "There are four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion: *conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism." *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, New edition. (Routledge, 1989), 2-3.

authors. Secondly, we can infer the impact of evangelical books on evangelicals due to continued book sales on Islam and Muslims published since 9/11.

I happen to be friends and colleagues with several of the authors referenced in this paper. Hence, I am compelled to give a disclaimer. I do not mean any disrespect or vilification of any of the authors in this paper. Many, if not most, are sincere Christians who, at the deepest level, want to honor God. This paper intends to critique the substance of their work, rather than the persons themselves.

## Literature Review

This literature review surveys other analyses of Christian thought on Islam. There are a number of studies on Western images of Islam.<sup>2</sup> Most of these works refer heavily back to a few key texts. The most cited text is Norman Daniel's *Islam and the West: the Making of an Image*. Daniel surveys Western and Christian thought on Islam from the time of Islam's genesis to the medieval ages as well the general relationship between Islam and Christianity. Daniel argues that the metaphors and images of the medieval period toward Muslims endure to the present. This is Daniel's most compelling point and is integral to my hypothesis. Images of Islam and Muslims have endured throughout time.

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<sup>2</sup> Before the third edition of Daniel's work was released in 1966, another modern classic appeared: Richard Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Harvard University Press, 1962). Since that time, there have been a number of major medieval studies Western views of Islam. The following is a sample list just from the year 2000: P. Almond, "Western Images of Islam, 1700-1900," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 49 (2003): 412-424; Kai Hafez, *Islam and the West in the Mass Media: Fragmented Images in a Globalizing World* (Hampton Pr, 2000); Nasir Khan, *Perceptions of Islam in the Christendoms: A Historical Survey* (Solum Forlag, 2006); Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); C Michelmores, "Old Pictures in New Frames: Images of Islam and Muslims in Post World War II American Political Cartoons," *Journal of American and Comparative Cultures* 23, no. 4 (2000): 37-50; Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells, *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy* (Columbia University Press, 2003); Katharine Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Since that time there have been a variety of other major medieval studies on Western views of Islam.<sup>3</sup>

Among the most notable works on contemporary images of Islam in the West and/or in Christendom are Albert Hourani's *Islam in European Thought* and Maxime Rodinson's, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*. In these works, Hourani and Rodinson, both highly respected scholars, examine images of Islam from the late eighteenth through the twentieth century. Hourani is characteristically spectacular in his grasp of the biographies of the people who shaped Western thought. Interestingly, texts such as Hourani's and Rodinson's are really just as much critiques of the study of Islam in the West as they are analyses of Islam's image in the West. This critique, of course, is most apparent in work of Edward Said, particularly, in *Covering Islam* and the modern classic, *Orientalism*.

Hippler and Lueg, in their edited volume, *The Next Threat; Western Perceptions of Islam*, deconstruct the concept of "Islam as enemy". The authors are fierce in their attack on the West for unduly responding to Islam as a "threat" to modernism, the West, and a peaceful human community: "The current vogue for popular literature about the Islamic threat has little to do with the supposed threat itself – Islam – and more to do with Western thinking, with a lacuna in our identity due to the Cold War."<sup>4</sup> The Western

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Frassetto and David R. Blanks, *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other*, 1st ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); John V. Tolan, *Saracens* (Columbia University Press, 2002); Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Jochen Hippler and Andrea Lueg, *The Next Threat: Western Perceptions of Islam* (Pluto Press, 1995), 1.

media and politics are largely culpable for encouraging a negative perception of Islam.

Hippler and Lueg also blame the media for encouraging a negative perception of Islam.<sup>5</sup>

Frederick Quinn's *The Sum of all Heresies* is one of the newest books that survey Christian thought on Islam. The author identifies threads of thought within historical Christian responses to Islam and Muslims spanning more than a dozen centuries. He shares Daniels conviction that the "basic image of Islam in the West was in place by the Middle Ages and continues to the present."<sup>6</sup> Due to the high level of contact between the Muslim world and the West, images of Islam are perhaps most complex in the twentieth century.

#### *Existing Analysis of Contemporary Evangelical Thought*

For the purposes of this thesis, the difficulty with the works mentioned above is that they do not clearly delineate who exactly holds what image of Islam in which period. Furthermore, one is hard pressed to find analyses anywhere of specifically evangelical thought on Islam within these texts. The works of Thomas Kidd, Richard Cimino, Benjamin-Lee Hegeman, and Warren Larson are unique in that they survey evangelical Christian thought and at least touch on the post 9/11 context.

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<sup>5</sup> The most well known vilification of the visual media is Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, 2nd ed. (Olive Branch Pr, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies*, 159.

*Thomas Kidd*

The ambition of Thomas Kidd's book, *American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims From the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism*, is very similar to my own; namely, to use Islam as a reference point to learn more about American Christians. Overall, Kidd finds three phenomena that have persisted among American evangelicalism for three centuries. American evangelicals have used Islam to justify their own religious or political convictions. Second, they are consistently pushing for conversion of Muslims to evangelical Christianity. Lastly, they have inserted Islam nicely as a major player in their eschatology. Kidd also observes three tensions throughout American Protestant interactions with Muslims. The first tension is the difference between the image and reality in Americans' view of mission work among Muslims. The second tension is the change from historicist eschatology (most prophecies have been fulfilled already in history) to futurist eschatology (most prophecies have yet to be fulfilled in history). Third, Kidd shows the clash of dispensational ambitions and missional ambitions. Because Kidd's work is a historical survey of evangelical thought on Islam over several centuries, his review of post 9/11 evangelical thought is constrained to just his last chapter; thus, it is highly selective and thematic rather than comprehensive.

*Richard Cimino*

Richard Cimino, editor of the journal *Religion Watch*, has also written on evangelicals and Islam in the post 9/11 context.<sup>7</sup> His article most closely addresses the topic of my own thesis. His main argument is that evangelical discourse after 9/11 reveals that the ascendancy of Islam in the public eye has challenged evangelical identity and caused evangelicals to further retreat within themselves. Islam has become one of the fronts of evangelicalism's battle against its two primary challenges, syncretism and relativism. In response to Islam, evangelicals have reasserted their differences as a way of securing their own identity.

Cimino's methodology is fair, but very limited. He conducts a content analysis of a select number of popular evangelical books published before and after 9/11 that he located through the catalogue of the Christian bookstore – Family Christian Stores – as well a content analysis of *World Magazine* from 1996-2002. The books he studied are hardly representative of broader evangelical thought on Islam; rather, Cimino set himself up to find mostly conservative, antagonistic attitudes toward Islam as well as a propensity toward apocalyptic motifs within his selected literature. The same critique applies to his selection of *World Magazine*. This magazine is a bastion of Christian compassionate conservatism and does not represent all of evangelicalism on Islam nor on other issues.

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Cimino, "New Boundaries -- Evangelicals and Islam After 9/11" (*Religion Watch*), <http://www.religionwatch.com/doc/2005-Cimino-Evangelicals-Islam.pdf>.

*Warren Larson*

Warren Larson, the Director of Zwemer Center for Muslim Studies at Columbia International University, reviews seven evangelical Christian books on Islam since 9/11 in a June 2006 *Christianity Today* article.<sup>8</sup> He groups them into those that demonize Muhammad and those that are “better books”. He is irenic and missional in his response to Islam and critical in his response to Christians writing about Islam. In Larson’s view, the worst title since 9/11 is evangelical pastor John MacArthur’s *Terrorism, Jihad, and the Bible: a Response to the Terrorist Attacks* (2001). The most sensible books on Islam since 9/11 are Timothy George’s *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad* (2002) and Phil Parshall’s, *The Cross and the Crescent: Understanding the Muslim Heart and Mind* (2002). Larson’s overview is helpful as a starting point. He surveys seven books. In my research here I have surveyed almost one hundred evangelical books on Islam since 9/11.

*Benjamin-Lee Hegeman*

Benjamin-Lee Hegeman wrote an article in the *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* called “Beware of Dhimmi Writers”.<sup>9</sup> In fairly perfunctory fashion, he classifies fourteen centuries of Christian thought on Islam into a mere three major classes. First, “reconnaissance writers” are defined by their defensive and fearful style. He further breaks down these writers into four groups: “silent warners” who alert Christians about

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<sup>8</sup> Warren Larson, “Unveiling the Truth About Islam,” *Christianity Today*, June 2006, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/june/29.38.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin-Lee Hegeman, “Beware of Dhimmi Writers,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (October 2007): 432-439.



Islam, “apologetic debaters”, “vocal polemicists”, and “academic critics”. Secondly, there are “dhimmi writers” who are defined by a fearful, cautious, and submissive style.

Hegeman identifies “academic dhimmies”, “dialogue dhimmis”, and “marketing dhimmis” and “appeasement dhimmis”. Lastly, Hegeman mentions “engagement writers” who embrace a fearless and engaging style. There are three types of these engagement writers: those who simply share about Jesus, those who diplomatically interact with Muslims examining both the Bible and the Qur’an, and “conversational fishers of men”. Hegeman’s taxonomy is helpful, since before his own work a taxonomy of this sort had not been achieved. Hegeman’s attempt at surveying fourteen centuries in a few pages is an impossible task.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, there are two types of secondary research within literature on Christian views of Islam. The first, such as the work of Daniel, Southern, and Quinn try to synthesize all of Christian thought (Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and so on) on Islam over the span of centuries. The second, such as the work of Thomas Kidd, Richard Cimino, Benjamin-Lee Hegeman, and Warren Larson focus on evangelical Christian thought. This thesis draws upon the works of the former, but focuses only on American evangelicals in the manner of the latter.

## CHAPTER 2: WHY IS ISLAM RELEVANT?

Before explaining *what* evangelicals think about Islam and Muslims, we must first understand *why* they are even interested in Islam. This chapter answers that question, as well as the question of how evangelicals motivate other evangelicals to study Islam. Every author or pundit is, in a very real sense, a salesperson of ideas and arguments. Unsurprisingly, therefore, that many authors begin their books trying to establish topic relevance.

With few exceptions, evangelicals establish topic relevance using demography. This fascination with demography spans across the different classes of evangelical thought on Islam. Most evangelical books on Islam begin in the same way as Baptist pastor Michael McCullar's, *A Christian Guide to Islam* (2008):

With more than one billion adherents, Islam is the second largest religion in the world. To place this into perspective, Christianity has two billion followers and is seven hundred years older than Islam. One in every five people on earth is a Muslim, and the majority of those who live in places other than the Middle East. Succinctly stated, Islam is pervasive and reaches into every corner of the world.<sup>1</sup>

McCullar's introductory statement tries to establish topic relevance of his introductory book on Islam by explaining the demographic pervasiveness of Islam. In the second sentence of his introductory book on Islam, he compares Islam with its religious

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<sup>1</sup> Michael McCullar, *A Christian's Guide to Islam* (Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2008), vii.

antecedent, Christianity. This pattern repeatedly appears in evangelical thought on Islam: establishing topic relevance through a comparative demographic overview of Islam and Christianity.

Joel Richardson establishes topic relevance with the argument that “Islam is the future.” It is the future because of its demographic growth.<sup>2</sup> This is fascinating given what alternative reasons could be. For instance, he could cite spiritual reasons: the devil is active in Islam and therefore evangelicals should care about Islam. Or one based in strict adherence to the mission of Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20), “God has called us to ‘reach’ Muslims with the Gospel, therefore, we must learn about Muslims.” Instead, Richardson and others reveal their deep concern that Christianity might be outnumbered, even wiped out, by Islam.

Demography does not simply justify topic relevance; it is *in itself* an indicator of how evangelicals think about Islam in comparison to their own faith. Demography lays the foundation for understanding the “challenge” of Islam to Christianity; therefore,

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<sup>2</sup> Joel Richardson begins his book on Islam with a chapter addressing topic relevance entitled, “Why this book? Waking up to Islamic Revival”: “This leads us to the most obvious reason to take notice of Islam; its dramatic and rapid growth and its present worldwide revival. The clearest reason to study and understand Islam and specifically Islamic eschatology is quite simply because Islam is the future. Yes, you read that correctly: Islam is the future. If present trends do not change dramatically, Islam will bypass Christianity for the title of the world’s largest religion very shortly. In fact, according to most statistics, this may take place in less than twenty years. A majority who read this book will live to see this. Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world, growing at a rate four times faster than Christianity. Presently those who practice Islam make up approximately one fifth of the world’s population. One seasoned Bible teacher from England after reviewing the statistics recently commented that, ‘if present trends continue, half of all global births will be in Muslim families by the year 2055’. Something dramatic and revolutionary is happening right before our eyes, and most western Christians are oblivious to it. The purpose of this chapter is to inform the reader about the rapid growth of Islam. The picture that is about to be painted may surprise some people. Some may be confused. Some may even deny it, but it is the truth and it needs to be told. Even by itself, the growth and spread of Islam is a powerful wake up call to all Christians.” Joel Richardson, *Antichrist: Islam's Awaited Messiah* (Pleasant Word-A Division of WinePress Publishing, 2006), 23-24. In this quote, Richardson quotes David Pawson, *The Challenge of Islam to Christians* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2003).

demography takes on cosmological meaning as it describes the very worth of a religion. In other words, the veracity of religion is linked to its numerical adherence. This is why evangelicals overwhelmingly point out which religion is “number one” in the world. The almost ubiquitous phrase is, “Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world.” The logic behind this statement is that being the “fastest” has cosmological significance. In a video interview with evangelical apologist John Ankerberg, evangelical author and seminary professor Emir Caner said, “The good news in all of this is that Christianity is still the number one religion in the world and that it is growing faster in many places around the world than any other religion, in fact two to one.”<sup>3</sup> At the beginning of his main chapter on Islam, evangelical missions leader George Otis Jr. writes about the demographic growth of the Muslim world.<sup>4</sup> He supports his argument that Islam is the most forceful and strongest of the spiritual superpowers (others: materialism and Hinduism) using demographic facts. Islam is a cosmic challenger to Christianity because of its growing popularity. Therefore, as the Muslim world expands, so does the challenge of Islam to evangelicals. For evangelicals, the rapid growth of Islam means something *eternally* important. Demography often provides the tangible evidence that they need to make their case for the influence of Islam in the world today. This Islamic influence is tri-directional: spiritual, cultural, and political.

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<sup>3</sup> “The John Ankerberg Show,” *Ankerberg Theological Research Institute*, <http://www.ankerberg.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> George Otis, *The last of the giants* (Tarrytown N.Y.: Chosen Books, 1991), 61ff.

## **Spiritual Influence**

Evangelicalism is, at its essence, a spiritual religious system. After all, evangelicals boast in their conviction that a person obtains eternal salvation not by the works done in this world, but by faith in a historical and spiritual reality, the person of Jesus Christ. Evangelicals are deeply concerned about the souls of mankind. This is one reason why they are so concerned with the issue of whether Christianity or Islam is growing faster and farther.

The growth of Islam not only in the global East but also in the global West poses a significant spiritual problem for evangelical Christians. The souls of their own ethnic brethren are now up for grabs by Islam, among other competing non-Christian faith systems. Demography signifies spiritual strength. Given the growth of Islam all over the world, there is spiritual urgency to learn about Islam.

The growth of Islam galvanizes missionary zeal among evangelical Christians. For instance, John Ankerberg states on one of his webcasts:

We've got Islam conquering the population, in terms of growth numbers, we've got Islam growing in terms of conquest by the sword, in the future we're going to see more of this. They don't have the truth, we have the truth, we need to stand up now.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "The John Ankerberg Show."

Demography is used strategically by Ankerberg to fuel a missionary impulse (“we need to stand up now”). Joel Richardson believes that demographic trends leading to the possible domination of Islam over Christianity should lead us to yearn for a Christian revival.

A more recent illustration of how demography fuels missionary zeal is an internet video circulated virally among evangelicals and others alike. It was anonymously released on March 30, 2009 on YouTube, entitled “Muslim Demographics”, and highly viewed.<sup>6</sup> The message and method of this video are not aberrant among evangelical presentations on Islam; rather, the video illustrates a number of commonplace tactics within evangelical writing and speaking on Islam. The video utilizes ominous language to inspire fear.<sup>7</sup> The video uses demographic indicators, such as fertility rates, to warn that Islam will basically dominate Europe in one generation, and the rest of the world not long thereafter.<sup>8</sup> Produced anonymously, these facts and quotes may not be reliable.<sup>9</sup> In the end, the narrator calls Christians to action: “As believers, we call upon you to join the effort, share the Gospel message with a changing world. *This is a call to action.*”

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<sup>6</sup> As of August 9, 2009, this evangelical video on Islam was viewed on the YouTube version alone just over 10 million times. *Muslim Demographics*, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-3X5hIFXYU>

<sup>7</sup> “The world is changing. The global culture our children inherit will be vastly different than what it is today. You are about to witness a report on the world’s changing demographics.”

<sup>8</sup> “In just thirty nine years, France will be an Islamic Republic.” The video claims to quote the German Federal Statistics Office saying that Germany’s “downward spiral is no longer reversible. It will be a Muslim state by the year 2050.” The video then proceeds to North America, starting with Canada and then addressing the United States: “In 1970 there were 100,000 Muslims in America. Today there are over 9 million. The world is changing, it’s time to wake up.” To sum up, the video claims, “Some studies show that in five to seven years [Islam] will be the dominant religion in the world.”

<sup>9</sup> The important thing to note for the purpose of this paper is not necessarily whether the statistics and quotes are factually true, but rather that the video uses them so compellingly. In fact, the numbers in the video have been meticulously debunked. For a list of responses, see Justin Long, “Mission Researchers Respond to the Muslim Demographic Video,” *The Network for Strategic Missions*, May 13, 2009, <http://www.strategiconetwork.org/2009/05/mission-researchers-respond-to-the-muslim-demographic-video/>.

This last statement is fascinating, for two reasons. First, the viewer does not know until the last twenty one seconds that this is actually a Christian video calling Christians, in traditional evangelical fashion, to “share the gospel” with others. Secondly, the video calls Christians to “share the gospel” based on the motive of reversing disadvantageous demographic changes in the world, in which are currently leading to the spread of Islam and eventually world domination. In other words, the video appeals to the Christian’s ethos: Christians should “share the gospel” because they are so drastically losing the spiritual and civilizational tug-of-war with Islam. The motive for missionary activity here is indisputably and unashamedly *fear*.

### **Cultural Influence**

While evangelicals care about the souls of mankind, they are often equally passionate about preserving their own way of life. Thus the growth of Islam not only poses a spiritual problem, but also a cultural problem. As an illustration of the anxiety towards Islamic cultural influence, Ellis Skolfield’s introductory book on Islam notes, “The migration of millions of Moslems into the West and the terrorists that came with them is the most serious threat our culture has faced since Adolf Hitler. Though we didn’t go looking for trouble, trouble has come looking for us.”<sup>10</sup> The connection between demographic growth and the threat of more violence could not be clearer: increase the number of Muslims, and increase the threat to our culture.

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<sup>10</sup> Ellis Skolfield, *Islam in the End Times*, 1st ed. (Fish House Publishing, 2007).

According to many evangelicals, the highest degree of Islamic cultural influence in Western lands is found in Europe; Europe is a futuristic reflection of what American might become. The world has watched as Europe struggles with how to integrate its vast immigrant population into its political and cultural frameworks. Struggles in Europe have been over cultural items, such as the Islamic headscarf, Islamic education, and the interplay between western secular law and *shari'ah* law. This concern for the cultural influence of Islam came to a head when in early 2008 the leader of the Anglican Church, Rowan Williams, publicly stated that he would not be opposed to the incorporation of some parts of *shari'ah* law into British common law. This statement unsurprisingly sparked an international conflagration among Anglicans, as well as concerned evangelical Christians, and non-Christian Westerners.<sup>11</sup>

### **Political Influence**

The election of Keith Ellison as the first Muslim to serve in the American Congress in 2006 was a watershed for Islamic influence in America. Finally, “Islam” had someone in a seat of American political power. The election caused a firestorm of controversy on the local and national level, due to Mr. Ellison’s religion. There were a number of grassroots and national efforts to ban his appointment to Congress due to the fear that he would be the first of many.

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<sup>11</sup> “Sharia law in UK is 'unavoidable',” *BBC News*, February 7, 2008, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/7232661.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/7232661.stm); Noah Feldman, “Why Shariah?” *The New York Times*, March 16, 2008, sec. Magazine, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/16/magazine/16Shariah-t.html?ex=1363320000&en=8a9c9bceeb43a1ae&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>.



Evangelical authors push for political responses to the growth of Islam because of the connection between Islam and terrorism. An article by one of the most influential conservative American evangelicals, Charles Colson, illustrates this perceived correlation. Colson often writes in reference to Islam in his regular email newsletter *Breakpoint*. In his September 11, 2007 piece, he pleads that Americans not lose determination to fight Islamic “soft terrorism”, as well as violent terrorism.<sup>12</sup> Colson explains that “soft terrorism” is the “the process of migrating and establishing Muslim communities in non-Muslim areas [which] is an important part of Islamic theology.” Building on the ideas of a former Muslim living in Britain, Patrick Sookhdeo, Colson sounds an alarm of a grand Muslim strategy to achieve “domination of European countries through a policy of concentration in geographic areas.”

The tone of Colson’s article is three fold: anger against “Islamofascist terrorists,” anxiety about the growth of Islam in the West, and urgency and fear that America is only years behind Europe in terms of its Muslim population: “We have to ask ourselves: Will what is happening in Europe eventually happen in America?” Despite the fact that Islamic communities in America have, on the aggregate, a very peaceful history spanning before Independence,<sup>13</sup> Colson suggests that Muslims in America are a relatively dangerous population segment. Thus, Colson does not hesitate to draw the precarious

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<sup>12</sup> Chuck Colson, “Soft Terrorism,” *The Christian Post*, September 11, 2007, <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20070911/soft-terrorism/index.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Jane Smith, a scholar on Islam in America, notes, “It is now a well-established fact that a significant number of black Africans brought to North America during the antebellum slave trade were Muslim. Numbers are impossible to determine, but there may have been several thousand.” (*Islam in America* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1999]); Sylviane Diouf has conducted a detailed study of these slaves in *Servants of Allah: African Muslims enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

connection between the intentional formation of Muslim communities in the West and “soft terrorism.”

A minority of evangelicals motivate their audiences to learn about Islam and Muslims with theological and/or doxological reasons, as opposed to demography. Timothy George, the prominent evangelical leader who is the founding Dean of Beeson Divinity School of Samford University, is one of those minority leaders. In his text on Islam, he quotes the well-respected and Christian Islamist extraordinaire, Anglican Bishop Kenneth Cragg: “To hold back from the fullest meeting with Muslims would be to refrain from the fullest discipleship to Christ. Not to care about Islam would be not to care about Christ.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, part of the essence of devotion to Christ is the impulse to know others who God loves, including Muslims. This is due to the Christian belief that that God Himself in Jesus Christ crossed cultural and geographical boundaries to inhabit an infinitely lesser quality territory out of love for humanity and passion for their joy in knowing Him. Therefore, just as God has gone to such great lengths to know and dwell with sinful humanity, he is also sending out his true followers (Christians) to know and inhabit all the earth as messengers of the love of God and denizens of His Kingdom. This theological approach to establishing topic relevance is surprisingly rare, given that individual adherence to the “Gospel of Jesus Christ” is one of the classic hallmarks of American evangelical Christianity.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Timothy George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?* (Zondervan, 2002), 19.

<sup>15</sup> David W Bebbington calls this characteristic of evangelicalism, “crucicentrism.” *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, New edition. (Routledge, 1989), 2-3.

## **Conclusion**

Within the study of evangelical perspectives on any subject, it is rare to find patterns that span the entire corpus of religious literary production. The widespread and salient use of demographic analysis to establish topic relevance is, therefore, significant. The growth of Islam means more souls lost to Jesus. Demography matters to evangelicals not just for the sake of measuring worldly dominance, also because demography signifies the cosmological battle between God and Satan.

### **CHAPTER 3: TAXONOMY**

Classifications of thought are tremendously delicate as well as meaningful. People are complex. They can be classified by their religion, their religious school of law, their religious sect, their ethnicity, their demographic profiles, their way of life, their worldview, their culture, their associations, and so on. Therefore, even the most arduous attempt at classifying people and their religious perspectives will fail due to over simplicity. This goes for evangelical taxonomies of Muslims as well as my own taxonomy of evangelicals. This does not imply, though, that we should abandon the effort altogether. In fact, when approached with utmost discretion, taxonomies can be useful for gaining broad sociological insight. In this thesis, I seek to broaden Benjamin-Lee Hegerman's taxonomical work on evangelical writings about Islam in the post-9/11 context. Insofar as his is the only serious effort to categorize this type of literature, I believe my taxonomy will contribute significantly to knowledge in this area.

There are different ways to break up and analyze evangelical Christian thought on Islam and Muslims. One of those is comparable to a statistical time series analysis, that is, to take a specific subject within Islam and analyze how evangelicals think about it over time. Gabriel Reynolds has done just this with one Islamic cognitive artifact: Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. He surveys how Christians have thought about Muhammad in the medieval period, in the enlightenment, and in the modern period. Christian thought on Muhammad was initially highly polemical. The Enlightenment brought favorable non-Christian perceptions of Muhammad into the discourse, and the modern period has included systematic study of Muhammad the man and prophet, which

has opened the door to increased debate. Reynolds briefly classifies Western evangelical Christian thought on Muhammad. On the one end of his spectrum of thought, he cites a paper presented at a 1987 missions conference citing Muhammad as the messenger of God. On the other end he places Phil Parshall, American missionary to Muslims and author of two of the books in my own analysis. In the middle, he places Anglican scholar of Islam Kenneth Cragg because knew the inherent value and beauty of Islam.<sup>1</sup>

Another way to categorize evangelical thought on Islam is to use an evaluative metric. This is the method of choice for my research. I have classified evangelical literature on Islam based on the metric of *intent*. In other words, I have asked the question of each book, “What is the author primarily trying to accomplish with this book?” There are four discernible intentions of evangelical Christian literature in the post 9/11 context: to provide information (informational), to call people to advance Christianity among Muslims through word and deed (missional), to defend Christianity and debunk Islam (apologetic), and to explain the End Times (prophetic). This chapter will look in depth into each one of these categories. Below is a simple introduction to each category followed by detailed exposition. The Appendix provides a full listing of the books in their respective categories.

### **Informational literature**

Books within this broad category are written to inform the broader Christian public on Islam and Muslims. Most of the books are for beginner audiences; as their titles

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Said Reynolds, “Muhammad Through Christian Eyes,” *Books and Culture*, February 2002, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/bc/2002/janfeb/2.6.html>.

suggest, they are “handbooks”, “pocket guides”, “facts” that aid in “understanding Islam.” They often imply that Islam needs “unveiling.” Therefore, the authors give their readers the scoop on “inside Islam” and they expose the voices from “behind the veil.” They are written by the broadest collection of authors, including pastors, missiologists, former Muslims, missionaries and apologists. This genre does not require expert authors. Several of the authors of the more popular books are not particularly experts on Islam.

### **Prophetic Literature**

This class of literature is prophetic either in its argument or in its tone. These books are typically severely negative in tone towards Islam. With many of them, Islam plays a negative role in the End Times and in the spiritual realm. Unsurprisingly, accredited academic authors are absent here due to the confessional nature of the genre. Authors are hard pressed in this field to provide evidence for their claims that are at least satisfactory or, at best, scientific. Therefore, the genre is mostly polemical and predictive of times to come. The books in this category focus overwhelmingly on the Middle East region, as this is the location of most Biblical prophecy fulfillment.

### **Apologetic Literature**

This literature looks at the proofs of Christianity and Islam. These books are aimed at both a Muslim and Christian audience. The books seek either to explain Christianity or to explain away Islam, or both. Also in this category is the strange selection of literature on Islam written by Muslim converts to Christianity. In terms of

tone, these books normally fall slightly on the positive side. Many popular evangelical books, articles and websites include apologetic passages. In this category, however, I only include writings wherein defending Christianity or debunking Islam is the central theme, rather than a supporting theme.

### **Missional literature**

These books share one major characteristic: their subject is the advancement of the Gospel among Muslims. The dividing line is often amorphous between missional and informational thought. Missional books are overwhelmingly irenic in tone towards Muslims and positive toward Islam. The authors most often seek bridge building with Islam rather than bridge burning, as is common also in the apologetic categories of thought. All types of authors write these books, as the missional impulse is integral to the evangelical movement. Many evangelical books on Islam include references or even a chapter on how Christians may build opportunities to “share the Gospel” with their Muslim neighbor or friend. However, I do not include a book in this category unless mission is central to the intention of the book.

## INFORMATIONAL LITERATURE

By far, the informational classification has the largest number of books since 9/11. This is not surprising, since 9/11 sparked an information craze about Islam, not only among evangelical Christians, but also among all Americans. Never before in America's history have popular bookstores been so stocked with books related to Islam, Muslims, and the Middle East. This is a positive development for Christian-Muslim relations. Evangelicals, from elite influencers to the average parishioner, are discussing Islam and Muslims like never before. The classic Orientalists no longer hold the keys to basic knowledge about Islam.

But books and websites are not enough by themselves to significantly strengthen Christian-Muslim relationships. Ultimately, evangelicals grow to appreciate Islam and Muslims through relational contact with actual Muslims. On that account, American evangelicals are lacking. A February 2009 survey of evangelical leaders by the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) showed that almost three quarters of respondents do not have a mosque in the proximity of their home or workplace, and more than two thirds of evangelical leaders indicated that they have had no close contact with an individual Muslim.<sup>2</sup> Leith Anderson, the president of the NAE, commented on these numbers that, "The large majority of Evangelical leaders who have not experienced Islam first-hand are either ignorant of Islam or are getting their information from secondary sources."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Evangelical Leaders Survey: Minority have contact with Muslims," *National Association of Evangelicals*, February 2009,  
<http://www.nae.net/index.cfm?FUSEACTION=editor.page&pageID=557&IDcategory=1>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



Interestingly, Christian explanations about Islam are repetitive. One reason for this is that the core doctrines of Islam are fairly straightforward. Another reason for this repetitiveness is that a certain few books have widely influenced post 9/11 evangelical apologetics about Islam. The work of the Caner brothers, Emir and Ergun, stand tall among these few influential texts. Their most influential book is *Unveiling Islam: An Insider's Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs* (2002). This book is the only book on Islam or Muslims to win the highly coveted Christian book award of the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association (ECPA) since the founding of the award in 1978. Unsurprisingly, it won in 2003, which is the first year it could have won after its publishing in 2002. The Caners admit that they wrote and published the book expeditiously as a response to 9/11 and the demand upon the authors to help Christians discern Islam and the 9/11 attacks.<sup>4</sup> The only book close to winning the ECPA award was the compilation *Encountering the World of Islam*, edited by Keith Swartley. It was a runner up to the 2006 award.

### **Taxonomy of Muslims**

One of the most interesting findings of this research is how the informational books themselves break down and organize the Muslim world into just a few categories. The study of these taxonomies turns the mirror on evangelical authors, revealing why and how they chose to classify their subjects. The variables that are used to classify Muslims reveal what is most important to evangelical authors. Three organizational variables stand

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<sup>4</sup> Ergun Caner and Emir Caner, *Unveiling Islam: an insider's look at Muslim life and beliefs* (Grand Rapids MI: Kregel Publications, 2002), 26.

out: evangelicals mostly classify Muslims by the level of their social activism, their level of piousness, and their propensity towards *jihad*.

First, evangelicals tend to classify Muslims by their activism. Evangelical Christians are interested in what policies different Muslims will support, what activities in which they engage, and how fervently they give themselves to promoting their causes. The clearest representative of this is Larry Poston and Carl Ellis's classification of Muslims. They break the American Muslim community up into two main categories: defensive-pacifist and offensive-activist Muslims. Defensive-pacifist categories Muslims are those who tend to assimilate quickly and quietly. They express themselves, but without community stir, as they are "hesitant to do anything which might point to them as outsiders." The offensive-activist Muslims, on the other hand, more aggressively propagate Islam. They come from places like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey and Pakistan. There are two kinds of offensive-activists: those that are activists in their home country and those that are nominal in their home country, "but upon being insulted or having Islam insulted or threatened they dig their heels in and become more activist."<sup>5</sup> The main issue for Poston and Ellis is how Muslims act within Western society.

Jim Murk's taxonomy is similar to Poston and Ellis. He classifies Muslims as fundamentalists, traditionalists, modernists, and secularists. "Fundamentalists" reject democracy and Western culture while pushing for the global rule of *shari'ah*.

"Traditionalists" are resistant to innovation and western ideas. Murk suggests that they

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<sup>5</sup> Larry Poston and Carl F. Ellis, *The changing face of Islam in America: understanding and reaching your Muslim neighbor* (Camp Hill, PA: Horizon Books, 2000), 3, 22-27 Although this was published before my period of analysis (2001 onward), I have included it because it is the most well known explicitly evangelical book that has been written on Islam in America in the last fifteen years (in fact, it is the *only* one of this sort that I could find).

could be called “non-militant fundamentalists.” “Modernists” want Islam to conform to the modern world. Murk classifies the leaders of Egypt, Pakistan, Morocco, and Indonesia as modernists. Lastly, “secularists” vie for separation between mosque/church and state.<sup>6</sup>

Second, evangelicals are concerned with the level of piousness of Muslims. They classify Muslims according to the question, “How much does ‘Islam’ influence the daily activities of the person’s life?” Fouad Masri is the leader of Crescent Project, an equipping organization for Christians reaching out to Muslims in America. In his six-week DVD curriculum on Islam and Muslims, Masri says that there are three types of Muslims: cultural Muslims, Muslim converts, and devout Muslims.<sup>7</sup> David Pawson classifies Muslims into nominal, liberal, and conservative Muslims.<sup>8</sup> Mark Gabriel’s taxonomy emphasizes how much a person knows and practices. His typology of Muslims includes the liberal Muslim who is “modern” and “often intellectual”; the “ordinary” and “secular” Muslim which is his version of the “cultural Muslim”; the “committed Muslim”, in which knows, believes, and practices some of the teachings of Islam; finally, the “radical, fundamentalist” Muslim, who knows, believes, and practices all the teachings of Islam.<sup>9</sup> The critical factor for Masri, Pawson, and Gabriel is the extent to which their religion dominates the daily lives of Muslims.

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<sup>6</sup> Jim Murk, *Islam rising: the never ending jihad against Christianity* (Springfield MO ;: 21st Century Press, 2006), 29-30.

<sup>7</sup> He likely includes “converts” because his focus is on training Christians to reach out to Muslims in America. Fouad Masri, *Bridges - Christians connecting with Muslims* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Crescent Project, 2008), 37.

<sup>8</sup> David Pawson, *The challenge of Islam to Christians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003), 71-72.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Gabriel, *Culture clash*, 1st ed. (Lake Mary Fla.: Frontline, 2007), ix-xiii.

In much of the informational evangelical literature, those who ascribe to Islam in name only are often referred to as “cultural Muslims.” The idea of a “cultural Muslim” profoundly perplexes most evangelicals. How can there be “cultural Muslims” if the religion of Islam is a “total way of life?” This apparent dissonance leads Emir and Ergun Caner to speak of the “oxymoronic nature” of cultural Islam.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, evangelical writers often assume that “true Muslims” will be radical fundamentalists. In the words of Mark Gabriel, “Though we call them radicals, they are practicing true Islam.”<sup>11</sup> This is why the infamous 2006 film *Obsession* claims that a deceptively high amount of “moderate” Muslims are in fact radical.<sup>12</sup>

Evangelicals are often perplexed by the idea of “cultural Islam” and prone to themselves define the meaning of “true Islam” for two reasons – reasons that are unique to evangelicals as opposed to other religious and nonreligious groups in America. First, many evangelicals identify theologically with the Puritans. In fact, puritanical Calvinism is rapidly on the rise among America’s evangelicals.<sup>13</sup> Calvinism is a total system of

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<sup>10</sup> They argue, erroneously, that cultural Islam is a new development in Islamic history. “In virtually every other country with a vast number of Muslims, adherence to Islamic teachings, and specifically to the mosques, was unquestioned. Yet in North America, a new movement has developed among second and third-generation citizens who still identify with their Muslim family heritage but in practice are nominal at best. Within this ‘cultural Islam’ circle, there is a swelling number of Muslims for *Eid al Fitr*... but diminishing attendance at regular Friday prayer times.” Emir Caner and Ergun Caner, *More than a prophet: an insider's response to Muslim beliefs about Jesus and Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003), 164-165.

<sup>11</sup> Mark A. Gabriel, *Islam and Terrorism: What the Quran Really Teaches About Christianity, Violence and the Goals of the Islamic Jihad* (Creation House, 2002), 39.

<sup>12</sup> Wayne Kopping et al., *Obsession radical Islam's war against the West*, 2006, <http://www.obsessionthemovie.com/>.

<sup>13</sup> *Time* recently identified “new” Calvinism as one of the ten ideas changing the world in 2009. David Van Biema, “The New Calvinism - 10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now,” *Time*, [http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1884779\\_1884782\\_1884760,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1884779_1884782_1884760,00.html); for a fascinating profile of one of these Calvinist evangelical younger leaders, see Molly Worthen, “Who Would Jesus Smack Down?” *The New York Times*, January 11, 2009, sec. Magazine,

religious observance, since God ordains all things principally for his glory. Devout evangelicals stigmatize “cultural Christians”, or nominal Christians, since they do not “walk the walk.” Evangelicals are often aware of the difference between cultural religion and devout religion. They understand this difference for themselves and impose the same dichotomy upon the Muslim world. Therefore, it is very difficult for an evangelical to consider a “cultural Muslim” a “true Muslims” because many would not consider a “cultural Christian” a “true Christian.” The second reason is that evangelicals, by definition, believe in the inerrancy of the Bible and its applicability to an individual’s daily life. In the same way that evangelicals impose their idea of what it means to be truly religious on Muslims, they also impose their rules of Scriptural hermeneutics on Muslims. Truly pious persons, therefore, take their Scriptures literally. If the Qur’an is taken absolutely literally, or puritanically, then one will certainly tend towards violent behavior, given the historical recounting in the Qur’an of violent events.

Third, some authors tend to classify Muslims based on the issue of *jihad*. The evaluative question is, “How likely is the person to engage in *jihad*?” This is the derivative question of “Is Islam a peaceful religion?” On the most simplistic level there are just two kinds of Muslims in regards to this question: those that are prone to violence and those that are not. The most commonly used phrases that address this issue are “moderate” or “radical.” This dichotomous break down of Muslims is perhaps the most common classification scheme of Christians as well as in the secular milieu. The highly controversial pundit on the Middle East, Daniel Pipes, succinctly paraphrases the idea

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[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/magazine/11punk-t.html?\\_r=3&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/magazine/11punk-t.html?_r=3&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&pagewanted=all).

behind this dichotomization of Muslims: “radical Islam is the problem and moderate Islam the solution.”<sup>14</sup> Jim Murk agrees that with respect to violence there are “two Islams” in the Qur’an.<sup>15</sup> This classification of Muslims into “moderates” and “radicals” frequently spills out of the domain of religious writing and into the domain of politics and foreign policy. For example, after 9/11 President George W. Bush consistently spoke of two worlds within the Muslim world: moderate verses extremist, freedom versus tyranny, and most commonly in his rhetoric, good versus evil. As an example, consider a 2006 speech then President Bush made to the UN General Assembly: “Will we support the moderates and reformers who are working for change across the Middle East – or will we yield the future to the terrorists and extremists? America has made its choice: We will stand with the moderates and reformers.”<sup>16</sup> Evangelical author James Beverly argues that moderate Muslims are “normal” and extreme Muslims are the ones who support Osama bin Laden. He explains that there are two kinds of Islam: “One group admires, defends, and supports the work of international terrorism in the name of Allah. The other, much larger group sees the actions of September 11 as a betrayal of Islam, the Prophet, and the Qur’an. Only time will reveal which view will carry the day.”<sup>17</sup>

Mark Gabriel delves further into the moderate/radical classification. He dissects the idea of a “moderate” Muslim into three categories: first, secular, or “ordinary”,

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<sup>14</sup> Daniel Pipes, “A Million Moderate Muslims on the March,” *DanielPipes.org*, May 8, 2007, <http://www.danielpipes.org/4497/a-million-moderate-muslims-on-the-march>.

<sup>15</sup> Murk, *Islam rising*, 92ff.

<sup>16</sup> Permanent Mission of United States of America to the United Nations, Address by H.E. Mr. George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, at the 61st session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 19 September 2006.

<sup>17</sup> James A. Beverley, *Understanding Islam*, Nelson's Quick Guide To Religions (Thomas Nelson, 2001), 57, 63, 76.

Muslims. According to him, these are the majority of Muslims and are “not well educated in Islam.” If they were, of course, they would not be “secular.” The second group of moderate Muslims is “liberal.” These Muslims are well educated in Islam, but they do not themselves want to have an Islamic theocracy. Lastly, there are the orthodox, or traditional, Muslims. These Muslims are “in the middle of the teaching and culture of Islam.” They are, therefore, the main recruiting ground of Islamic terrorists.<sup>18</sup> With a dual typology (moderate and extremist), there is most often the idea that the moderates are the mobilization ground of the extremists. In the evangelical mind, this injects populous power into the idea of “Muslim extremists.”

### **Focus On Correct Practice**

In their classifications of Muslims in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, evangelical writers focus overwhelmingly on what Muslims believe to be correct practice (orthopraxy), rather than what they consider to be correct dogma (orthodoxy). In other words, evangelicals are concerned not necessarily about what Muslims *think* about God and society, they are concerned rather with what they *do*. This is a counterintuitive conclusion. After all, each of the greatest evangelical movements, as well as the greatest fights within American Protestantism, had to do with abstract issues, namely, theology and culture. Therefore, one would expect that evangelicals are most interested in the things about Muslims that most concern them about themselves. There are at least three reasons why this is not the

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<sup>18</sup> Mark Gabriel, *Journey into the mind of an Islamic terrorist*, 1st ed. (Lake Mary Fla.: FrontLine, 2006), 181-185. In another book, Gabriel has three categories in which are basically similar in meaning to those above: secular, traditional, and fundamentalist. Gabriel, *Islam and Terrorism*, 39.

case when it comes to Islam and Muslims. First, classifying people by what they do is much easier than classifying them by what they think or feel. The details of Islamic theology, philosophy, and jurisprudence are cumbersome. Even more cumbersome is the task of grouping Muslims by these things. Taxonomies are supposed to be simple – Islamic jurisprudence is not simple. Secondly, evangelicals are, on the whole, pragmatists. Most evangelicals in America are interested in just a few questions about Islam and Muslims, “What is their agenda?” “Are they violent?” “How can I tell if a Muslim is prone towards terror?” “How do I reach them with the Gospel?” Thirdly, in the minds of many American evangelicals, the “challenge” of Islam is relatively practical. It has to do with things like policies on religious observance in government offices, freedom to pray in public areas, gender issues, and the growth of Islam due to conversions, immigration, and birth rates. Within an overwhelming proportion of literature on Islam there is an undertone of anxiety about Islam and Muslims, even in the more irenic literature. For the most part, this anxiety is due to concerns over correct religious practice, rather than correct dogma.



## PROPHETIC LITERATURE

Prophecy matters, even for atheists. It matters because people who believe in it act based upon it. Irrespective of its particular veracity, people react with ardor to it.<sup>19</sup> Prophecy also brings relief in times of turmoil. After all, prophecy tells the unseen supernatural story about seen conflicts and complexities. Therefore, it is not just devout evangelical Christians that look to prophecy. Instead, prophetic writings are a phenomenon in all major world religions, and in America prophecy is an industry in itself.<sup>20</sup> According to a 2002 poll, more than one-third of Americans are paying attention to how the news might relate to the end of the world. Over half believe in the predictive veracity of the book of Revelation, and almost one-quarter think the Bible predicted the attacks of September 11, 2001.<sup>21</sup>

Evangelical Christianity embraces Biblical prophecy as both historically veritable and presently relevant. Some evangelical Christians take this a step further by ascribing meaning and present/future events to the actual prophecies. This step of prophetic ascription to current events is ambiguous, and often consequential. Classic protestant

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<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Bonk makes this point nicely, writing, "Divinely revealed futures within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam has served as the underpinning for invasions, occupations, wars, genocides, exterminations, expropriations, migrations, executions, suicides, racism, and ethnocentrism, as well as various kinds of bizarre but essentially harmless behavior." (Jonathan Bonk, "Christian Mission and the End of Time," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 33, no. 3 (July 2009): 113).

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Bonk recalls the work of William Sherden in making this very same point: "In Fortune Sellers: The Big Business of Buying and Selling Predictions (John Wiley & Sons, 1997), William Sherden took a hard look at the modern prophecy industry and at the soothsayers who make a handsome living out of human anxiety about the future. He estimated that North Americans spent \$200 billion dollars annually for the forecasting services of meteorologists, economists, stock market gurus, demographers, technology assessors, and, of course, prophecy buffs. Of fourteen different genres of forecasting identified by Sherden, only two - one-day ahead weather forecasting and predictions positing an aging population - have proven reliable." *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>21</sup> Nancy Gibbs et al., "Apocalypse Now," *Time*, July 1, 2002, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1002759-1,00.html>; for an extensive study of prophecy in American culture, see Paul Boyer, *When time shall be no more: prophecy belief in modern American culture* (Cambridge Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992).

hermeneutics maintains that Biblical prophecies can have double, if not several, meanings that span over time. Some prophecies had their secondary fulfillment in the New Testament period, specifically in the person of Jesus. Some are still waiting fulfillment. It is these latter prophecies that some evangelical Christian writers have focused on with great detail and controversy. For readers not familiar with the vast and abstract genre of Christian prophecy, it is important to note that there is hardly a prophecy that escapes controversy. This is due to the simple fact that the prophecy, by definition, comes before the events in which they describe. Therefore, controversy arises not only about what the prophecy means but also which events are actually fulfillments of the prophecy and not just random events otherwise mundane. Controversy also arises because most Biblical prophecies are abstract: there are often good arguments for different interpretations of End Times prophecy.

One does not have to read far into the prophecy writings of evangelicals to see how prophecy is linked to politics. Political opinions are formed out of prophetic convictions. The precise link between prophecy and politics is the future. In other words, prophecy foretells the headlines of the past, present, and future, and as such, may influence decision making in international affairs. This is why George Otis Jr. says that the prophecies of *Daniel*, *Ezekiel*, and *Revelation*: “must be viewed not merely as the curious highlights of eschatological tour books, but as strategic road maps for

tomorrow.”<sup>22</sup> Or as one evangelical pastor puts it, “Ezekiel’s prophecy: today’s newspaper.”<sup>23</sup>

The period before 9/11 produced the landmark books on Islam and the End Times. According to Thomas Kidd, dispensationalism “dominated the field of popular American Christian eschatology and its relationship to Islam in the late twentieth century.”<sup>24</sup> Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* was the watershed piece of 1970. Along with his follow up book, *1980: Countdown to Armageddon*, Lindsey espoused his distinctly premillennial dispensationalist interpretation of the last days, arguing that the last days were at hand.<sup>25</sup> President John F. Walvoord of Dallas Theological Seminary wrote one of the most influential books of his time on the Middle East and prophecy: *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis: What the Bible Says About the Future of the Middle East and the End of Western Civilization* (1974). Grant Jeffrey had several books in the latter 20<sup>th</sup> century that soared in sales: *Armageddon: Appointment with Destiny* (1990), *The Millennium Meltdown* (1999), and *The Spear of Tyranny* (2000).

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<sup>22</sup> George Otis, *The last of the giants* (Tarrytown N.Y.: Chosen Books, 1991), 200. In this book Otis actually maps out a “possible timeline” for the unfolding of the End Times events. 2010 will include a revolution in Saudi Arabia leading to new leadership more ideologically akin to Osama bin Laden, a U.S. invasion of Saudi Arabia, and the advent of a nuclear Middle East as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt will gain the nuclear bomb. In 2011, Otis predicts that “aroused Muslims armed with their clearest proof yet of a Crusader invasion on sacred ground” will launch a nuclear bomb on American soldiers in Saudi Arabia. In fact, Otis guarantees that Muslims would not hesitate to launch this bomb in this case (165). The US would not answer bomb for bomb. 2012 will feature a stare down between the U.S. and the Islamic world. The Mahdi will rise to power and the Islamic Jesus will return to earth inaugurating a time of intense persecution for true Christians. By 2014 the ascendant Islamic world will increasingly focus attention on Israel. Between 2015-2017 the Mahdi’s regime will further reveal the “essential elements of Muhammad’s faith: its intolerance for other religions, its tendency toward violence and its zealous belief that it is the agent for Allah’s rule on earth” (171).

<sup>23</sup> Mark Hitchcock, *The coming Islamic invasion of Israel* (Sisters OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2002), 93.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Kidd, *American Christians and Islam: evangelical culture and Muslims from the colonial period to the age of terrorism* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009), 140.

<sup>25</sup> “The decade of the 1980s could very well be the last decade of history as we know it.” Hal Lindsey, *The 1980’s, countdown to Armageddon*, Bantam ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 8.

These same themes continue to animate evangelical prophetic literature in the post-9/11 period.

### **Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism**

“Dispensationalism” is central to evangelical writings in the prophetic genre. Dispensationalism is, at its core, a theological paradigm that explains the nature of God relationship with mankind throughout history. Dispensationalism manifests itself in the contemporary period as support for modern day, ethnic Israel, for it is believed that the ethnic Israeli people play a critical part in God’s historical plan for mankind. Dispensationalism, in turn, undergirds evangelical Christian Zionism. The prophecy pundits of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have become the implicit butt of recent evangelical backlashes against Christian Zionism, and, tacitly, against dispensationalism. Before analyzing prophetic literature on Islam, it is important to address the exact meaning of dispensationalism and Christian Zionism.

Dispensationalism is most broadly an interpretive framework based on literalist interpretation of the Bible for understanding the Bible, history, and the End Times. History is broken up into different “dispensations” wherein God makes different sets of promises to different sets of people. Most notably for this paper, dispensationalism maintains that the Israel of the Old Testament is ethnic Israel today; all of God’s promises to Israel in the Old Testament apply today to ethnic Jewish people. Therefore, the return of the Jewish people to Palestine is understood as a divinely granted hallmark in accordance with God’s promises and as a precursor to the return of Christ. The End

Times include the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem – in the present location of the Dome of the rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Dispensationalists believe that all Christians will be “raptured” to heaven before the rise of the Antichrist to international power (this is called the “tribulation” period). Jesus will then return and defeat the Antichrist and his forces in Armageddon and establish his millennial reign. Interpretation of current events in Israel-Palestine through the lens of the End Times is a distinctly dispensational practice. In a very real sense, dispensationalism upholds that there are two chosen people of God – Israel and the church. The most direct rival to dispensationalism is covenant theology, which maintains that the church is the new Israel; spiritual conformity, rather than ethnic, establishes a right relationship with God.

Estimates of the number of dispensationalists are rough, as it is almost certain that the influence of dispensationalism on evangelicals is significantly greater than the number of evangelicals that would identify themselves as theological dispensationalists. George Marsden is helpful on this matter: “Even most of those neo-evangelicals who abandoned the detail of Dispensationalism still retained a firm belief in Israel’s God-ordained role. This belief is immensely popular in America, though rarely mentioned in proportion to its influence.”<sup>26</sup> That caveat stated, estimates of the number of dispensationalists range from about ten percent to one third of the total number of evangelicals in America.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> George Marsden, *Understanding fundamentalism and evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 77, quoted in Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: road map to Armageddon?* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2004), 23.

<sup>27</sup> The figure of ten percent comes from John Green, “Evangelical Protestants and Jews: A View from the Polls,” in *Uneasy allies? Evangelical and Jewish relations* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2007); The one-third figure comes from, “How Many Are There?,” *Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals*,

It is very difficult to classify American dispensationalists. Dispensationalism as a theological framework is not monolithic, nor are its proponents. It is, therefore, drastically unfair and methodologically crippling to lump all dispensationalists together. This literature review of prophetic books on Islam includes a range of dispensationalist writers, some of whom would be considered on the extreme fringe of dispensationalism.<sup>28</sup> Since my research focuses on *popular* evangelical Christian thought on Islam, I have mostly left out the scholarly discussion among evangelical missiologists about what should and should not be considered worthy dispensationalism.

A Christian Zionist refers to a person who supports the modern day state of Israel as a Jewish homeland because of their Christian faith.<sup>29</sup> Numerous scholars have analyzed the phenomenological connection between evangelical Christianity and Zionism. It is well observed that evangelical Christian Zionism has played an influential role in continued American support of Israel. Of this significant body of scholarship, one

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<http://isae.wheaton.edu/defining-evangelicalism/how-many-evangelicals-are-there/>. The total number of evangelicals is also difficult to ascertain; the ranges are from forty million to 100 million.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Pocock, a senior professor of missions at the dispensationalist flagship seminary, Dallas Theological Seminary, argues that Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkin's *Left Behind* series and Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth* are "the best-selling but overly dramatic popularizations of what many understand to be standard representations of [dispensationalism]." He goes on to say that "the triumphalistic and apocalyptic Christian Zionism of [John] Hagee and Hal Lindsey is not appropriate... Christian Zionism as espoused by these men is an example of an unintended consequence of earlier [dispensational] thinking." But Pocock's argument has not been easily accepted by others, such as Colin Chapman. Chapman is one of Western evangelicalisms most steady voices on mission and Islam, who questions Pocock's characterization of Lindsey, LaHaye, Hagee, and so on, as on the fringe of dispensationalism. Chapman suggests that, instead of fringe, these writers are simply taking dispensationalism to its natural conclusions in the present day – i.e., ardent Christian Zionism. Either way, a simple survey of retail Christian bookstores will show that the LaHayes, Lindseys, and Hagees of Christian literature rule the shelves on prophecy, especially prophecy as it relates to Islam. Michael Pocock, "The Influence of Premillennial Eschatology on Evangelical Missionary Theory and Praxis from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 33, no. 3 (July 2009): 129-131; Colin Chapman, "Premillennial Theology, Christian Zionism, and Christian Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 33, no. 3 (July 2009): 113-168.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2008), 3.

recently published title is relevant to the rest of this chapter. Stephen Spector's *Evangelicals and Israel the story of American Christian Zionism* (2009) outlines the reasons for evangelical support of Israel. It is crucial to understand these reasons as they influence broader evangelical, prophetic and political thought on Islam. First, many evangelicals, in a sense, seek their own blessing in their support of Israel based in the promise of Genesis 1:3. In the words of Jerry Falwell: "God has blessed America because America has blessed the Jew. If this nations wants her fields to remain white with grain, her scientific achievements to remain notable, and her freedom to remain intact, America must continue to stand with Israel." Second, God picked Isaac as the progenitor of his people, not Ishmael (see Genesis 16-17, 21-22). The Arabs are forever, then, the thorn in the side of the Jews. Third, evangelical Christians look to ethnic Israel as a prophetic clock. The return of the Jewish people to the promise land and the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948 is often understood as a global sign of the imminence of the second coming of Jesus. The Jewish state is, therefore, evidence of the Biblical narrative (cf. Luke 21:24). Fourth, dispensational evangelicals believe that mankind will be judged based on how we treat Israel (cf. Joel 3:1-2). Fifth, there is a sense of gratitude among many evangelicals; after all, "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). Sixth, remorse abounds for tolerating or perpetrating past anti-Semitism. Many non-evangelicals alike share this remorse. Seventh, Israel is a lone Western style democracy among a region of despots. This has undoubtedly played into the close alliance between America and Israel. Ninth, the Jews restoration to the promise lands hastens the second coming of Jesus, according to dispensationalist theology. Lastly, some evangelicals find themselves akin to

the Jews because of a common antagonist: Muslims. Indeed, some evangelicals view Jewish (Western)-Muslim relations as an earthly representation of a cosmic battle between God and Satan.<sup>30</sup> Theologically, Christian Zionism is a product of dispensationalism. Though, as Spector list shows, there are numerous other sociological and historical foundations for Christian Zionism. Dispensationalism and Christian Zionism have been formidable forces within contemporary evangelicalism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century.

### **Themes Within Prophetic Literature**

#### *Antichrist*

The idea of the Antichrist is a prominent theme in the prophetic literature. There are two meanings to the word “antichrist.” First, they are the ever-present agents of evil that work against the Kingdom of God.<sup>31</sup> In Christian thought there is also the notion of a coming Antichrist. This one will come in the End Times and severely persecute the people of God. In the mind of many Christians, Islam has found its way into both identities. As far back to the first American Christians in the eighteenth century, Islam was considered one of the two great antichrists. Sometimes Islam was partnered with

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 23-35.

<sup>31</sup> The New Testament refers to these types of “antichrists” in 1 John 2:18.



Roman Catholicism and/or the Pope.<sup>32</sup> Sometimes it was partnered with the Ottoman Empire, as in the great eighteenth century puritan mind of Jonathan Edwards.<sup>33</sup>

Pentecostal evangelistic Perry Stone, as well as Ralph Stice argue that Muslims will see the Antichrist as their long awaited Mahdi. The Mahdi will rule the Kingdom of the Beast. Stone argues that this Mahdi will arise to power from ancient Assyria (Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon) and will use weapons of mass destruction to hold nations hostage. The rule of the Antichrist will be in seven phases: control of Israel, control of Jerusalem, convert the world to his own religion, destroy all opposition to his control, control all buying and selling, control Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and finally establish the worship of the Antichrist as God. The Mahdi will be joined by the Islamic Isa (Jesus), who will deny the cross and proclaim the glory of Islam.<sup>34</sup>

Some authors argue that the rise of the Islamic Antichrist is encoded in the very texts of the Bible. Author Jeffrey Manty proposes that the Islamic Mahdi will be the Antichrist. But he proceeds farther into associating Islam with the Antichrist, arguing that the hidden name for Lucifer in the Bible is “Alah” and that Lucifer’s is linked with the word “holocaust.” Therefore, the future of mankind includes a “holocaust to Alah.” He

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas Kidd notes, "Figures as various as Puritan lay leader Anne Hutchinson, the judge Samuel Sewall, and pastors Increase and Cotton Mather and Edward Taylor all commented on the connection" between Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Antichrist (Ibid., 8).

<sup>33</sup> In his own words: "The two great works of the devil that he in this space of time wrought against the kingdom of Christ are his erecting his Antichristian and Mohammedan kingdoms, which have been and still are two kingdoms of great extent and strength, both together swallowing up the ancient Roman empire; the kingdom of Antichrist swallowing up the western empire, and Satan's Mohammedan kingdom the eastern empire." Jonathan Edwards, "A History of the Work of Redemption," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, ed. John F. Wilson, vol. 9, 1739 (Yale University: Jonathan Edwards Center, 2008), 410, <http://edwards.yale.edu>.

<sup>34</sup> Perry Stone, *Unleashing the Beast*, [Rev. ed.]. (Lake Mary Fla.: Charisma House, 2009); Ralph W. Stice, *From 9/11 To 666: The Convergence of Current Events, Biblical Prophecy, and the Vision of Islam* (ACW Press, 2005).

also argues that Islam is the Devil's newest reincarnation of moon god worship, a polemical claim going back to the medieval period.<sup>35</sup> Michael Fortner, in his short book *The Scarlet Beast: Islam and the Beast of Revelation* (2006), also tries to decipher hidden code within the Bible. Through various Scriptural and historical amalgamations, he concludes that the number of the Antichrist and Islam is 666.<sup>36</sup>

Roland and Michael Back argue similarly to Manty. They argue that the Great Prostitute of Revelation 17 will be a Muslim. Islam, the Devil's final and most ultimate attempt to take down Christianity, will open the door for the ascendance of the Muslim Antichrist.<sup>37</sup> J.C. Alexander also believes that Islam has set the stage for the rise of the Muslim Antichrist. He argues that "Islam is a totally Antichrist religion" and that there will be a ten nation Muslim antichrist confederacy that rules the world. Alexander and Robert Livingston differ from the writers above in that they believe that the Antichrist will be the Islamic Isa (Jesus), not the Mahdi.<sup>38</sup>

### *Gog and Magog*

The enigmatic characters "Gog and Magog" are prevalent within the prophetic genre. Prophecy authors are very concerned about the exact meaning of Gog and Magog. Despite their ambiguity, one fact is clear in the literature: Gog and Magog are enemies of

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<sup>35</sup> What is amazing about Manty's work is his confidence; at one point, he says that he can prove his arguments "beyond a shadow of a doubt." Jeffrey Manty, *Prophecy code: a new revelation for the last days* (Tuscon Ariz.: Wheatmark, 2007), 14.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Fortner, *The Scarlet Beast: Islam and the Beast of Revelation* (White Stone Press, 2006).

<sup>37</sup> Roland Back and Michael Back, *What is the Antichrist-Islam Connection?* (Lulu.com, 2007).

<sup>38</sup> J.C. Alexander, *The Kingdom of the beast and the end of the world: the truth about the end of this world according the Matthew 24, the Book of Revelation, Daniel and other end times prophecies* (Ozark Al.: ACW Press, 2005), 317-319; Robert Livingston, *Christianity and Islam: The Final Clash* (Pleasant Word-A Division of WinePress Publishing, 2004).

God and His people who will, in the end, be destroyed by God. They are often referred to in evangelical writing on Islam to help establish the evil origins of Islam, to predict the details of the End Times, and, subsequently, to influence public opinion on international affairs.

One of the main dispensational ideas through the twentieth century and into the twenty first century is that Gog and Magog are prophetic references to Russia and Islam. Magog is Russia and Gog is Islam. Some of the more notable writers who have argued this in the post 9/11 context are Grant Jeffrey, John Hagee, and Mark Hitchcock.<sup>39</sup> In short, Russia and the Islamic nations of the Middle East will join together and attack Israel as well as open the door for the Muslim Antichrist to rule the world. Other writers decisively left Russia out of discussion on Gog and Magog. Notable among them are Moody Bible Institute's Provost Michael Dryer, as well as Dryer's colleague at Moody, Michael Rydelnik.<sup>40</sup> Others, like George Otis Jr. deny any physical origin at all for Gog, arguing that God is the "territorial strongman that rules over the lands and peoples of Magog, Meshech and Tubal... If this theory is correct, then the spirit of Gog - totalitarianism - has incarnated various human vessels in the region over the course of

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<sup>39</sup> John Hagee, *Attack on America: New York, Jerusalem, and the role of terrorism in the last days* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 2001); Mark Hitchcock, *Iran: the coming crisis* (Sisters Or.: Multnomah Publishers, 2006); Grant Jeffrey, *The next world war: what prophecy reveals about extreme Islam and the West*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs Colo.: Waterbrook Press, 2006); Grant Jeffrey, *Armageddon : appointment with destiny* (New York N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1990).

<sup>40</sup> Charles Dyer, *What's Next?: God, Israel and Future of Iraq* (Moody Publishers, 2004); Michael Rydelnik, *Understanding the Arab-Israeli Conflict: What the Headlines Haven't Told You*, Revised. (Moody Publishers, 2007).

many centuries.” These human vessels include rulers like Sargon the Great, Sennacherib, Joseph Stalin, and Saddam Hussein.<sup>41</sup>

### *Syria, Iraq, and Iran*

The prophecy writers have an overwhelming distaste for Syria, Iraq, and Iran.<sup>42</sup> These countries are, therefore, the link between the rise of militant Islam and the End Times. Ellis Skolfield believes that the lion, leopard, and bear of Revelation 13:1-2 are Syria-Lebanon (leopard), Iraq (lion), Iran (bear). This trinity of Islamic nations “now stands against Israel and the rest of us” and they are “the final enemy of the Church and Israel.” They are unified in Satan’s Kingdom, which is manifested on earth in the religion of Islam. The invisible spiritual mark on all Muslims is 666.<sup>43</sup>

Not a few evangelicals have ascribed spiritual significance, even eschatological significance, to the rise and fall of Saddam Hussein as well as the second Iraq war. The first cognitive step that these authors make is to establish the existence of an evil spiritual stronghold over Iraq. Saddam Hussein is presented merely a minion of this Satanic stronghold. Glenn Miller argues that the war “was about the lying and masquerading Islamic Allah, who is a demon prince, and this false god’s stranglehold over that portion of the world.” The ultimate point of the Iraq war is not, therefore, about bringing down

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<sup>41</sup> Otis, *The last of the giants*, 212.

<sup>42</sup> This leads to an important question outside the bounds of this thesis: is the current distaste within prophecy writing due to the centrality of Syria, Iran and Iraq in current events or is the field of prophecy consistent throughout history, especially throughout the post colonial period (since the establishment of the three states)? If the answer is the former, evangelical antagonism towards the Middle East might subside. If the answer is the latter, antagonism towards the Middle East proves to be built into the very foundation and framework of the prophecy and political genre.

<sup>43</sup> Ellis Skolfield, *Islam in the End Times*, 1st ed. (Fish House Publishing, 2007), 90-94, 110; Ellis Skolfield, “The Fall of Islam,” *The Fall of Islam*, [http://www.fallofislam.com/Bible\\_Prophecy.html](http://www.fallofislam.com/Bible_Prophecy.html).

Saddam Hussein and establishing democracy, but about spiritual release of Muslims worldwide into a great revival.<sup>44</sup>

### *Prophecy as Evangelism*

Prophetic books commonly assume that their exposition of the End Times will lead Muslims to convert to Christianity. Sometimes this idea is explicit. At the end of his book on Iran and the End Times as well as his book on the Islamic invasion of Israel, Mark Hitchcock provides a “plan of salvation” and “sinners prayer” – both typical evangelical methods for “winning someone to Christ.”<sup>45</sup> The product description of Joel Rosenberg’s *Epicenter: Why Current Rumbles in the Middle East Will Change Your Future* (2006) says that the book is about “Faith--Joel shares his faith in Jesus Christ and the reliability of Scripture.” In fact, the book is an analysis of Middle East geopolitics but told through evangelical lenses. Dave Hunt, dedicates his prophetic book as follows: “Dedicated to all lovers of truth and freedom under God in the hope that the world [Muslim and non-Muslim] will escape the tyranny of Islam.”<sup>46</sup> This idea that prophecy is evangelism stems from the fact that American evangelicals are typically pragmatists. They thrive on action and momentum. Framing prophetic books as ultimately evangelistic plays into the pragmatic evangelical character.

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<sup>44</sup> “The War in Iraq: Prophet Shares Spiritual Viewpoint,” *The 700 Club*, February 25, 2005, [http://www.cbn.com/700club/guests/bios/glenn\\_miller\\_022505.aspx](http://www.cbn.com/700club/guests/bios/glenn_miller_022505.aspx).

<sup>45</sup> Hitchcock, *The coming Islamic invasion of Israel*; Hitchcock, *Iran*.

<sup>46</sup> Dave Hunt, *Judgement Day! Islam, Israel and the Nations* (The Berean Call, 2005).

## Backlash against dispensationalism and Christian Zionism

The backlash against evangelical Christian Zionist thought on the Middle East and Islam began before 9/11 but continues strong thereafter.<sup>47</sup> Thomas Kidd argues that one of the major reasons for the evangelical backlash against dispensationalist thinking about Islam is the clash of dispensationalist theology with missiology and mission-minded Christians. Dispensationalists, of course, would argue that they are just as mission-minded as the rest. A significant number of the flagship Bible institutes and seminaries that have churned out missionaries throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century are premillennial and even dispensational.<sup>48</sup> Leaders of the evangelical backlash counter dispensationalist defenses by emphasizing the priority of evangelism in Christianity and the negative effects of the politicization of prophecy on Christian mission, such as the

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<sup>47</sup> In 1986, American journalist Grace Halsell published the potently titled *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War*, (Lawrence Hill Books, 1986). Thirteen years after her, and apparently still very agitated by dispensational Christian Zionists, she wrote *Forcing God's Hand: Why Millions Pray for a Quick Rapture - and Destruction* (Crossroads International Pub., 1999). She calls dispensational Christianity a self-seeking cult that, due to its End Times theology, is working against human welfare as they yearn for the rapture and the end of the world. Don Wagner, one of the founders of Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding, has written several books on this topic. In 1988 he published the informational booklet on Christian Zionism, *What is Western Fundamentalist Christian Zionism?* (Middle East Council of Churches, 1988). In 1995 he published *Anxious for Armageddon: A Call to Partnership for Middle Eastern and Western Christians* (Herald Press PA, 1995). This book describes Wagner's personal transformation from a dispensational Zionism to passionate concern for the Palestinian-Israel conflict and partnership with the Middle East church. Stephen Sizer, another outspoken critic of Christian Zionism has argued that it is possible to be anti-Zionist without being anti-Semitic. I am grateful for the following sources for help in identifying many of the books in the following section: Stephen Sizer, "Christian Zionism: A Chronological and Annotated Bibliography," *Stephen Sizer Personal Website*, March 16, 2009, <http://www.stephensizer.com/2009/03/christian-zionism-a-chronological-and-annotated-bibliography/>; Ben White, "The other evangelicals," *The Guardian*, April 11, 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/apr/11/theotherevangelicals>.

<sup>48</sup> "Dispensationalism," *Wikipedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dispensationalism>; Pocock, "The Influence of Premillennial Eschatology on Evangelical Missionary Theory and Praxis from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present."

emergence of Christian Zionism and the consistently negative tone towards Arab Muslims.<sup>49</sup>

Stephen Spector lists the main critiques of Christian Zionism, which are helpful for a quick overview.<sup>50</sup> First, Zionist Christians support *aliyah* (Jewish emigration to Israel) mainly because it speeds the Rapture, Armageddon, the mass conversion or death of the Jews, and Christ's millennial kingdom. Second, evangelical Christians' true motive is to convert the Jews. Third, some critics charge that Christian Zionist theology distorts Christianity: it misunderstands biblical covenants and ignores the scriptural emphasis on doing justice, relieving suffering, and showing compassion to the oppressed, who, in this view, are the Palestinians. Fourth, the unofficial alliance between Christian Zionists and the extreme right wing Israel politicians in opposing any exchange of land for peace compromises the Zionist cause and creates suspicion over the integrity of Christian Zionist ideology. Fifth, Christian Zionism often puts forward unfeasible solutions and obstinately blocks the rest, such as rejecting a two state solution. Lastly, some Christian critics charge Zionists of ignoring the plight of Palestinian Christians, who are, in fact, the very spiritual kin to American evangelicals.

Since 9/11, there have been a handful of books that are critical of dispensationalism and Christian Zionism to hit at least the amorphous edges of the popular evangelical Christian book market. Anglican pastor Stephen Sizer, who is a reformed, conservative, evangelical Anglican pastor in Surrey, England, is probably the

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<sup>49</sup> Kidd, *American Christians and Islam*, 140.

<sup>50</sup> Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, 111-185. I added the last two reasons listed below, but they are referred to still in Spector's book.

fiercest critic of Zionism with the most potential for influence in the present day. His book, *Christian Zionism: Roadmap to Armageddon*, is a critical overview of Christian Zionism. Sizer argues that Christian Zionism betrays the Palestinians, and thereby, the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Also, the development, influence and exporting of Christian Zionism to the rest of the world yields “devastating consequences” in the Middle East, specifically in Palestine.<sup>51</sup> In 2007 Sizer followed up his first book with another critique of Christian Zionism, *Zion’s Christian Soldiers? The Bible, Israel and the Church*, this time from the platform of Biblical exegesis. At the same time of Sizer’s *Christian Zionism*, Timothy Weber published a critique of the relationship between dispensationalism and Israel entitled, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel’s Best Friend* (2004). Weber argues that before the founding and expansion of modern day Israel, dispensationalists were merely prophetic observers of international affairs who were content to watch and opine about prophecy fulfillment in the present day. After 1948, however, dispensationalists began to shape international affairs according to their own “divine script.” According to Weber, “When they shifted from observers to participants, they ran the risk of turning their predictions into self-fulfilling prophecies.”<sup>52</sup> In this way, dispensationalism too readily led to policy positions.

As an Anglican statesman on Islam, Colin Chapman has been a consistent voice for a more irenic, less prophetic approach to Islam and Muslims.<sup>53</sup> He criticizes

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<sup>51</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, 25.

<sup>52</sup> Timothy Weber, *On the road to Armageddon: how evangelicals became Israel's best friend* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 15.

<sup>53</sup> Colin Chapman, *Islam and the West: Conflict, Co-Existence or Conversion* (Paternoster Publishing, 1998); Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?* (Baker Books, 2002); Colin Gilbert Chapman, *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam*, 2nd ed. (IVP Books, 2008).



dispensationalism on the grounds that it instills instinctive support for Zionism over and against the cause of the Palestinian Arabs. He finds that Christian Zionists, most of whom are dispensationalists, are on the whole less enthusiastic about justice, a foundational theme of Christianity. Christian Zionism also serves as a stumbling block against the advance of the Gospel in that it effectively turns off the Arab world to western Christianity. Chapman also suggests that Zionism is a quick slope to dual covenant theology,<sup>54</sup> which does away with the need for Christian mission, since Jews are included in a very real sense in salvation. Lastly, Chapman argues that dispensationalism that leads to unquestioning support for Israel naturally leads to demonization of Muslims and Islam, which in Chapman's mind is not beneficial for Christians or Muslims.<sup>55</sup>

The most controversial book within American evangelical Christianity since 9/11 in which challenges premillennial dispensationalism is *The Apocalypse Code: Find Out What the Bible Really Says About the End Times . . . and Why It Matters Today* (2007), by Hank Hanegraaff. Hanegraaff is the widely popular evangelical Christian apologist known as "The Bible Answer Man." Hanegraaff is fiercely critical of the likes of Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye, who Hanegraaff vilifies as the ideological successor of Lindsey. Hanegraaff states that LaHaye and his forerunners have contributed to the undermining of the uniqueness and significance of Christ's resurrection<sup>56</sup>. *The Apocalypse Code* elicited numerous fiery critiques from dispensationalist influencers who

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<sup>54</sup> Dual covenant theology is a Christian doctrine, outside of mainstream evangelical theology, that Jews can obtain salvation by keeping the Old Testament law and according to the blessings given to Jewish patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

<sup>55</sup> Chapman, "Premillennial Theology, Christian Zionism, and Christian Mission."

<sup>56</sup> Hank Hanegraaff, *The apocalypse code: find out what the Bible really says about the end times-- and why it matters today* (Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), xix.

felt that he was unfair, sensational, and even profoundly erroneous in some matters.<sup>57</sup>

Putting the details of Hanegraaff's argument aside, the level of push back that Hanegraaff received from the dispensationalist camp indicates sensitivity in the dispensationalist camp of criticism. Interestingly, though, Hanegraaff's work is one of the only critiques of dispensationalism that penetrated the popular Christian market, instead of remaining within the milieu of ivory tower theologians and prophecy circles.

### **Initiatives Countering Christian Zionism**

There have been several different significant initiatives to counter antagonistic portrayals of Muslims as well as dispensationalist influence on policy making towards the Middle East. In 1986, Ray Bakke, American evangelical social engineer and founder of International Urban Associates, along with Don Wagner, founded Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding (EMEU). EMEU is a response to the "rising tide of western interpretation of the nation of Israel as the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy" that "threatens not only peace in the region, but also the Christian communities, especially those of the occupied Palestinian territories." EMEU is really a network that facilitates a conversation about the Middle East crises, the Middle East church, and mission to the Middle East. In the past, their conferences have hosted representatives from World Vision, the Southern Baptist Convention, Intervarsity, Mercy Corps, and Young Life,

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<sup>57</sup> See, for instance: Dillon Burroughs, "Examining Hank Hanegraaff's The Apocalypse Code," *Ankerberg Theological Research Institute*, <http://www.johnankerberg.com/Articles/biblical-prophecy/BP0707W1HH.htm>; Thomas Ice, "Pre-Trib Research Center: A Review of Hank Hanegraaff's The Apocalypse Code," *Pre-Trib Research Center*, <http://www.pre-trib.org/article-view.php?id=316>; Edwin Newby, "How The Apocalypse Code Parses the 'Generations'," *The Berean Call*, <http://www.thebereancall.org/node/6082>.

among others. While the exact impact of EMEU on shaping evangelical thought on Islam, the Middle East, and Muslims in general is unknown, the organization has been a gathering point for evangelicals concerned about the church of the Middle East as well as the dominant paradigm of Western evangelical thought towards Islam.

Ray Bakke participated in another major attempt to redirect the impressions of the world regarding evangelicals and the Middle East. On July 27, 2007 thirty-nine evangelical leaders, academic and pastoral, signed and published in the *New York Times* a letter to President Bush thanking him for reinvigorating the Israel-Palestine negotiations. The signatories avowed their support of a two state solution and implicitly critiqued Christian Zionism:

We also write to correct a serious misperception among some people including some U.S. policymakers that all American evangelicals are opposed to a two-state solution and creation of a new Palestinian state that includes the vast majority of the West Bank. Nothing could be further from the truth. We, who sign this letter, represent large numbers of evangelicals throughout the U.S. who support justice for both Israelis and Palestinians.

The signatory list was fairly unsurprising. Ron Sider, founder of Evangelicals for Social Action topped the list. Other names include Tony Campolo, president of the Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education, Joel Hunter, senior pastor at a mega church in Orlando, Richard Stearns, president of World Vision, and Jim Wallis, president of

Sojourners.<sup>58</sup> The letter is clearly directed as much toward the audience of the Bush administration as toward other American evangelicals. This letter was an attempt by the signatories to influence their coreligionists to rethink blink support for Israel.<sup>59</sup>

The day after President Obama's historic Cairo speech on June 4, 2009, fifty-four prominent Christian leaders sent another letter to the current president urging him to focus on the Palestine-Israel conflict and to push for a two state solution. This time the signatories included evangelicals as well as mainline Protestants and Catholics. Once again, this letter reads as much as a plea to fellow Christians as to the President. Notable new evangelical names on this signatory list include Dennis Hollinger, president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, an evangelical bastion in America's northeast, and Bill Hybels, senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, the fourth largest church in America and, by the account of one pollster, the most influential church in America.<sup>60</sup>

It is probably too early to tell whether evangelicals are moving away from an End Times hermeneutic towards a more irenic and practical approach to the Palestine-Israel conflict as well to Islam in general. The ballasts of dispensationalism are sturdy; but the

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<sup>58</sup> The letter as well as the full list of signatories is found at "Letter to President George W. Bush," July 27, 2007, <http://www.esa-online.org/Display.asp?Page=LettertoPresident>.

<sup>59</sup> As evidence of this point, note how Jim Wallis refers to this letter as a new evangelical initiative. Jim Wallis, "Politics Pushes Uneven Policies," *Sojourners*, September 17, 2007, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-wallis/politics-pushes-uneven-po\\_b\\_64749.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-wallis/politics-pushes-uneven-po_b_64749.html).

<sup>60</sup> "Top 50 Most Influential Churches in America," *Church Report*, [http://www.thechurchreport.com/mag\\_article.php?mid=1095&mname=July](http://www.thechurchreport.com/mag_article.php?mid=1095&mname=July); "The 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America," *Time*, February 7, 2005, <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101050207/index.html>; "Letter to President Obama," June 4, 2009, <http://www.esa-online.org/images/mmDocument/Declarations%20&%20Letters/Letter%20to%20Pres%20Obama%2006%2004%2009.pdf>.

two letters mentioned above may foreshadow things to come. Another terrorist attack on America by Muslim perpetrators, though, may mute these efforts.

### **Conclusion to the Prophetic Section**

While it is difficult to surmise how influential these prophetic pundits really are, dispensationalist books such as those mentioned in this survey dominate the apologetics and prophecy sections of popular Christian retail bookstores. While evangelical academia produces fine-tuned analyses of the prophetic Scriptures, when it comes to End Times evangelical Christian thought, a simple trip to the bookstore or search on Amazon.com proves that dispensationalism rules popular bookshelves.

## **APOLOGETIC LITERATURE**

Christian apologetics is a field of Christian academics that defends Christianity against theological opponents. The term apologetics comes from the Greek word *apologia*, meaning “in defense of.” From their earliest encounters with each other, both Christians and Muslims have presented apologetic arguments in defense of their faith. Modern apologetic books have three primary purposes: to build up the believer in their faith by helping them answer their own questions, to equip the believer to speak to nonbelievers about their faith with confidence and skill, and to answer the questions of nonbelievers directly about the faith. In this taxonomy, apologetics would at first sight seem to be the most outwardly looking of all the classifications. After all, the ultimate objective of this genre is to convince others of the sturdiness of the faith. But as this analysis shows, evangelical apologetic literature since 2001 reveals not as much of the questions that particular Muslims are asking about Christianity, rather, it reveals the basic problems that evangelicals have with Islam and with each other.

### **A Clash of Cognitions**

Norman Daniel’s analysis of Christian thought on Islam from the genesis of Islam through the modern era is a masterpiece as relevant today as it was in 1960 when it was first published.<sup>61</sup> Daniel’s overarching conclusion is that there is continuity in how Christians have reacted to Islam throughout the centuries. Daniel argues that this is not due to the transmission of thought about Islam from one generation to the next; rather,

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<sup>61</sup> Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: the Making of an Image*, reprint. (Oneworld, 1993).

continuity comes because of the constant nature of the problem – Islam.<sup>62</sup> After all, the precise theologies of Christianity and Islam have not substantially changed. Hence, Daniel’s work is profound evidence that cultural changes have only limited effect on the shaping of Christian thought towards Islam. Islam has been, in this sense, a challenge for Christianity at a fundamental level – it has posed questions about God, Revelation, and mankind that Christians have consistently dealt with throughout the century. Christians have not cognitively conquered Islam. Indeed, we may perhaps say that what led to a clash of civilizations was a clash of cognitions.

From St. John of Damascus (676-749) to the present, Christian minds have put forward fierce apologetics about Islam. Christian apologetic and polemical energies grew basically in proportion to Islam’s global visibility.<sup>63</sup> This pattern continues in the present day. In one sense, this is natural: we are most passionate about things that are closer to us. Due to immigration, globalization, and 9/11, Islam is closer to the evangelical conscience; therefore, evangelicals buy more books and talk more about Islam than ever before. In another sense, though, the direct correlation between reactions to Islam and nearness to Islam is unfortunate. Evangelicals have for too long been reactionary about Islam. They have missed their adolescence of thought about Islam. Evangelicals are still fairly infantile; they lack nuance and the ability to escape their own hermeneutical and cultural propositions in order to enter the cognitive sphere of Islam. Norman Daniel explains this effect, as it applied to medieval Christian apologists on Islam, as good as anybody:

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 14.

It is certain that the essentials of Islamic belief were known to those scholastic and other educated authors who took a serious interest in the subject [Islam]; much was even publicized by popular writers. There was not, of course, any very subtle appreciation of the niceties of Islamic doctrine, and there was not usually a great desire to understand what was known. We shall see that this knowledge served a polemic use, and that the data were assessed in ways that must be unacceptable to Muslims. There was more Christian propaganda than genuine attempt to communicate over the frontier. The physical frontier was not very clearly marked and was easily crossed. The frontier that divided the mental attitudes of Christians and Muslims was emphatically defined and crossed only with the greatest difficulty.<sup>64</sup>

Daniel's quote provides the analytical points for this section on apologetic literature on Islam. First, the growing number of books, both popular and academic, on Islam since 9/11 is a positive sign of increased interest in the basics about Islam. That being the case, the apologetic literature since 2001 reveals that evangelicals still lack appreciation of the substantive nuances of Islam and, though the information is as available as the internet or the local mosque, evangelicals on the whole do not seem interested in the details of Islamic theology and culture.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 66.



Compared to the other classifications in this taxonomy, the apologetics category comprises the fewest number of books (see the taxonomical chart in the appendix). This is not surprising for two reasons. First, publishers are market driven and, since 9/11, the market has demanded information and explanation about Islam, rather than a defense of Christianity in the face of Islam. Second, apologetics and prophecy are the only classifications in my taxonomy that has a separate field of literature directly associated with it. There are apologetics experts, books, programs, and even degrees at Christian universities. Apologetics regarding Islam, therefore, are not only found within books on Islam, but also within a number of other apologetics reference books.<sup>65</sup> In other words, the apologetics questions that Christians must answer in response to Islam are the same as those they must also answer in regards to a variety of other non-Christian religions and worldview systems. Therefore, there are more outlets to learn about apologetics in response to Islam than just books on Islam or from experts on Islam.

### **Explaining Christianity**

Apologetic literature on Islam exists for two primary reasons: to explain Christianity and to explain away Islam. Islam poses objections to orthodox Protestant Christian doctrine that are unique among those of other major world religions. The foundational and most consequential objection of the Qur'an to Christianity is that the Bible as it stands today is not entirely the Word of God; rather, it has been corrupted

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<sup>65</sup> There are many of these, but two of the more popular reference books to deal with Islam are Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, *Handbook of Today's Religions* (Thomas Nelson, 1992) and Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, Rev Upd. (Bethany House, 2003).

through time, transcriptions, translations, and direct molestation. The effect of this charge is that there is need for a new inspired text, namely, the Qur'an. According to orthodox Islam, the Qur'an singularly reveals all that is true and worthy and therefore there is no longer need to refer to the Biblical manuscripts for access to divine truth. Where the Qur'an and Bible conflict, the Qur'an always prevails. This objection sets the foundation for direct denial of other central Christian doctrines: the nature of God, including his unity/tri-unity, the prophethood/divinity of Jesus Christ, the nature of sin, and the path to eternal salvation. As a result of the Qur'an's attack on contemporary Christian texts, many evangelical authors focus their time on defending the veracity of the Biblical manuscripts.

The most well received, purely apologetic book on Islam is *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, by Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb. This book was first published in 1993 and then reprinted in 2002. I have included it in this analysis because of its popularity in the post 9/11 context. In the first two months after 9/11, the book sold over 20,000 copies, a distinct accomplishment for a relatively specialized book on Islam. Towards the end of those two months, The *Wall Street Journal* endorsed the book as one of the best-known "how-to books on recruiting Muslims."<sup>66</sup> The aim of this book is to "understand and evaluate the claims of orthodox Islam from a Christian point of view." The book's structure is a nice illustration of the general aims of Christian apologetics about Islam: the first section is an overview of basic orthodox Islam, the second section is a "Christian response" to basic Islamic doctrines, and the third section

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<sup>66</sup> Norman Geisler, *Answering Islam: the crescent in light of the cross*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids Mich.: Baker Books, 2002), 7.

is a defense of the Christian perspective. The actual apologetic explanations of the book are fairly standard, though this book offers probably the clearest apologetic and theological explanations of any evangelical Christian book on Islam in the twenty and twenty-first centuries.

The most interesting section in this book, for the purposes of this paper, is the preface to the second edition. The main point of this preface is that “Christians can no longer ignore the worldwide challenge of Islam. It is this challenge that assures the future of books like *Answering Islam*.” Before 9/11, they argue, “interest in the threat of Islam to Christianity was minimal.” Given the long battles with the threats of Communism, humanism, and the New Age Movement, “Christians were simply not ready for another threat.” 9/11 reignited the interest of evangelical Christians in the threat of Islam. The reason that *Answering Islam* has sold so many copies, Geisler and Saleeb claim, is that “non-Muslims suddenly realize that the religion of Islam, as embraced by millions of radical Muslims, has become a real threat, not only to Christianity but to freedom of religion in general and to our very way of life as Americans.” They have written this book, in part, because, “Like many other battles in history, [the authors] believe that the pen is sharper than the sword.... The success of Christianity over Islam as a world religion rises or falls on the battlefield of ideas.” The authors argue that given tremendous demographic growth of Islam in the world today, Christians “must renew efforts to thwart the efforts of militant Muslims to destroy Christianity.”<sup>67</sup> Clearly, Geisler and Saleeb

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

view apologetics as a weapon against evil, cosmic opponents to Christianity, in this case, Islam.

Two other books since 9/11, both written by Arab Christians, attempt to defend Christianity against Islam and for Christian Western audiences. The first is Fouad Masri's, *Is the Injeel corrupted?*<sup>68</sup> Masri's small book is an attempt to defend the historical integrity of the contemporary Biblical manuscript. Masri's organization, Crescent Project, also produced a six week video series for small groups that aims at mobilizing Christians to love Muslims and share the Gospel with them in a respectful way.<sup>69</sup> The second book is, *The Prophet & the Messiah*, by Chawkat Moucarry, a Syrian Christian and Director of Inter-Faith Relations for World Vision International.<sup>70</sup> In his book Moucarry argues for the supremacy of the Christian Gospel over Islam. Moucarry's essay, "A Christian Perspective on Islam", is a summary of his book and is supposed to be used in evangelism on college campuses. Both of these books are strictly apologetic attempts to explain Christianity, though Moucarry's book also directly attacks the integrity of Islam and its sources, a method that I refer to as "explaining away Islam."

### **Explaining Away Islam**

A variety of tactics are used to explain away Islam. These range from unabashed jabs – "there is increasing skepticism among experts about the value of both the Qur'an

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<sup>68</sup> Indianapolis Indiana: Crescent Project, 2006.

<sup>69</sup> Masri, *Bridges - Christians connecting with Muslims*.

<sup>70</sup> InterVarsity Press, 2002.

and *Hadith* in giving us trustworthy data on Muhammad”<sup>71</sup> – to less forceful approaches in which infer that Islam is not adequate path to gain God’s favor.

One common approach to invalidating Islam is questioning the rationality of Islam. The implication is that only irrational beings would accept Islam, unless, of course, they are ignorant of rational proofs against it. This was the assumption of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), the famous American puritan preacher. Gerald McDermott, a scholar of Edward’s thought on other religions, notes that Edwards denunciation of Islam was “unusually vitriolic because he considered Islam to be a foil for Reformed Christianity’s most dangerous enemy: deism.” Islam tends to “debase, debauch, and corrupt the minds of such as receive it.” Muslims were “an ignorant and barbarous sort of people.” Finally, Edwards thought that the very presence and propagation of Islam was evidence of the depravity of all mankind, or else they would not accept Islam; Islam’s propagation is a “great demonstration of the extreme darkness, blindness, weakness, childishness, folly, and madness of mankind in matters of religion, and shows how greatly they stand in need of a divine guide, and divine grace and strength for their help, such as the gospel reveals.”<sup>72</sup> Evangelicals question the rationality of Islam with the assumption that as apologetics unveils the proofs of Christianity and the proofs against Islam, Muslims will choose Christianity without hesitation.

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<sup>71</sup> James Beverley, *Understanding Islam* (Nashville Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 13.

<sup>72</sup> Gerald McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards confronts the gods: Christian theology, Enlightenment religion, and non-Christian faiths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 166; Jonathan Edwards, “Mahometanism compared with Christianity -- particularly with respect to their propagation,” in *The works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, 12th ed. (London: William Tegg & Co, 1879), 491-493, <http://www.advocateenterprise.org/mahomet.html>.

One of the more nuanced books to explain away Islam is that of highly popular evangelical author and pastor R.C. Sproul and Muslim convert to Christianity Abdul Saleeb, entitled *The Dark Side of Islam*.<sup>73</sup> This book is a fairly classic defense of orthodox, Protestant Christianity using Islam as the foil. The book establishes topic relevance using demography of the Islamic world, which is ubiquitous in evangelical literature on Islam as elsewhere in this paper shows: “You cannot afford to be misinformed about Islam, a religion whose influence is rapidly growing around the world.”<sup>74</sup>

The most refreshing aspect of this book is that the authors recognize that the challenges to the Christian faith come from more than just Islam and Muslims. Indeed, “The challenges come from all around us: agnostics, rationalists, Enlightenment thinkers, postmodernists, and Muslims.”<sup>75</sup> As a result, the criticisms of Islam against Christianity are not unique. The authors emphasize this point through discussion on different topics. A good example is the authors’ treatment of original sin. The orthodox Christian point of view is that Adam’s sin initiated ontological rebellion of humankind against God and therefore all mankind after Adam were born as enemies of God. Sproul points out that Islam really takes on a Pelagian view of sin, namely, that Adam’s sin affects Adam only. Pelagianism is not reincarnated in Islam, but also in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the Socinian heresy, then in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in liberalism on one hand and Charles Finny and Arminianism on the other.<sup>76</sup> Placing Islam within a litany of non-Christian ideologies has

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<sup>73</sup> Crossway Books, 2003.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., back cover.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 49.

a tremendous thawing effect on the evangelical mind. All of a sudden, Islam is not unique in its opposition to Christianity and Muslims are similar to all non-Christians within an evangelical worldview.

Another common strategy of Christian apologetics on Islam is to reinterpret the Qur'an according to Biblical hermeneutical standards without inquiring and accepting common rules of Islamic hermeneutics.<sup>77</sup> This approach is especially prevalent regarding the issue of *jihad*. One of the most common claims against Islam is that it endorses violence. Numerous verses from the Qur'an are commonly presented as evidence of the violent nature of the Qur'an.<sup>78</sup> This strategy is also employed to argue that the Qur'an endorses the contemporary Bible. Authors almost never consider with deference the interpretation of actual Muslims of those verses. Rather, conclusions are drawn based on the "obvious" meanings of the text. Norman Daniel's explanation of the mediaeval polemicists is equally applicable today: the apologists "apparently knew very well what the Qur'an says, and yet refused to consider what Muslims claim it means."<sup>79</sup> Perhaps more than any other, this approach inhibits healthy dialogue and cohabitation.

Evangelistic ambitions are common within the apologetic literature. Authors that try to explain away Islam often write as if they believe that their book has evangelistic power among Muslims. The most sincere effort at this is Samy Tanagho's *Glad News! God Loves You My Muslim Friend*.<sup>80</sup> Though published by an exclusively evangelical Christian publishing house, Authentic, this book was written for a Muslim audience. It is

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<sup>77</sup> Daniel shows how this was also prevalent in the mediaeval polemicists in *Islam and the West*, 77.

<sup>78</sup> See the following for a list of the most common verses that are referenced: Yoel Natan, "164 Jihad Verses in the Koran," <http://www.yoel.info/koranwarpassages.htm>.

<sup>79</sup> Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 71.

<sup>80</sup> Authentic Media, 2004.

an explicitly evangelistic apologetic for Christianity. As it walks through different doctrines of Protestant Christianity, it appeals to Muslims to become followers of Jesus. Endorsements for the book include reports that Muslims have read this book and have converted to Christianity as a result.

In addition to using Islam as an apologetic pedestal to propagate Christianity, there are other ways that evangelicals “use” Islam for their own ends. First, some use Islam rhetorically to denigrate other opponents.<sup>81</sup> Second, Islam has also been “used” by converts to establish their influence within the evangelical Christian community in America.<sup>82</sup> Third, some use Islam to tout the superiority of western civilization.<sup>83</sup>

## **The Other**

Evangelical apologetic literature thrives on establishing a constitutive Other – someone or something else to debunk. Islam is the newest, and perhaps the most feared, Other in the evangelical mind. The concept of “The Other” has been utilized mostly in the discipline of philosophy.<sup>84</sup> Edward Said took a groundbreaking step in applying it to

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<sup>81</sup> Using Islam to denigrate other opponents was a “well-established tradition” by 1800: this tradition consists of “citing the similarities between an opponent’s views and the ‘beliefs’ of Islam as a means to discredit one’s adversaries.” Antebellum polemicist linked Mormonism to Islam as a way of invalidating Mormonism. Evangelical leaders like George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards used Islam as an apologetics tool for the defense of Christianity. In the post-revolutionary period, and especially during the Barbary Wars, Islam was used to make political points about America and the West. Kidd, *American Christians and Islam*, 1, 14-17, 19, 26.

<sup>82</sup> The influence of Ergun and Emir Caner, Reza Safa, and Mark Gabriel is indisputably due to their former status as Muslims.

<sup>83</sup> As an example, see Alvin Schmidt, *Great Divide: Failure of Islam and Triumph of the West* (Regina Orthodox Press, 2004).

<sup>84</sup> See the following for a helpful overview of the influence of the concept of the Other: “Other,” Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Other>.



the field of international relations, specifically regarding the Arabs and Palestine.<sup>85</sup> The philosophical dimensions of evangelical Christian – Muslim relations are outside of the scope of this particular thesis. That said, it is important to note that Islam does function as a replacement of a series of historical Others in the evangelical mind, such as Roman Catholicism,<sup>86</sup> Eastern Orthodoxy,<sup>87</sup> Nazism, communism and the Soviet Union. Evangelical leaders seem to recognize this much. The former vice president for government affairs for the National Association of Evangelicals says, “Evangelicals have substituted Islam for the Soviet Union. The Muslims have become the modern-day equivalent of the Evil Empire.”<sup>88</sup> Bible prophecy expert Grant Jeffrey also agrees: “This development [of the next world war between extremist Islam and the West] represents the greatest threat to our freedom and way of life since the darkest days of the Third Reich and the Japanese attacks on the West in the 1940s.”<sup>89</sup> Don Richardson, evangelical missiologist, notes, “So, Islam follows Nazism, fascism and communism as the world’s latest hostile takeover aspirant.”<sup>90</sup> At a 2007 meeting of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, John Hagee exclaimed, “It is 1938; Iran is Germany and Ahmadinejad is the new Hitler.”<sup>91</sup> Former president George W. Bush told the American Legion national convention in 2006 that today’s terrorists are “successors to Fascists, to

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<sup>85</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st ed. (Vintage, 1979).

<sup>86</sup> Jonathan Edwards notes in his “The two great works of the devil that he in this space of time wrought against the kingdom of Christ are his erecting his Antichristian and Mohammedan kingdoms...the kingdom of Antichrist swallowing up the western empire, and Satan’s Mohammedan kingdom the eastern empire.” Edwards, “A History of the Work of Redemption,” 410.

<sup>87</sup> Kidd, *American Christians and Islam*, 46.

<sup>88</sup> Laurie Goodstein, “Seeing Islam as 'Evil' Faith, Evangelicals Seek Converts,” *The New York Times*, May 27, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/27/national/27ISLA.html>.

<sup>89</sup> Jeffrey, *The next world war*, 68.

<sup>90</sup> Don Richardson, *Secrets of the Koran*, Revised edition. (Regal Books, 2003), 161.

<sup>91</sup> Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, 72.

Nazis, to Communists and other totalitarians of the twentieth century.” This battle against terrorists is “the decisive ideological struggle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”<sup>92</sup> Islam is not only the contemporary Other for evangelicals, it is the ultimate Other.

### **Conclusion to Apologetics Section**

If Islam is a challenge to Christianity in the sense that it poses new objections, then the discipline of apologetics is helpful. Apologetics offers the techniques and substance to defend Christianity and refute Islam. Difficult questions are answered and logical fallacies are revealed. But apologetics do not offer any real help in facing the cosmic challenge of Islam. If Islam and Christianity are ontologically juxtaposed, then they are dependent on each other for their own existence. In the classic Hegelian sense, Christianity can only realize itself fully through its struggle with Islam. If Islam would cease to be, evangelical Christianity might perhaps lose more than expected. It might lose the ability to reshape itself according to the challenges that Islam pits against it. In other words, the evangelical tension with Islam is necessary for each to reach fulfillment. In this way apologetics is not of much value, since it seeks the destruction of one religion in favor of the other. In Hegelian language, successfully employed apologetics may lead to a lack of evangelical self-consciousness. Something more transformative than apologetics is needed to bring health to the relationship between Christianity and Islam. Something that is, perhaps, Divine.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 73.

## MISSIONAL LITERATURE

The term “missional” describes a person who adopts a missionary lifestyle, or one who lives in a way to demonstrate and declare the Gospel. “Missional” books on Islam intend to help Christians live out missional lifestyles among Muslims. Evangelicals believe, by definition, that all true Christians should propagate the Christian faith. Therefore, it is unsurprising that there are a plethora of American evangelical books, articles, pamphlets, and initiatives that fall into this missional category. There are three main types of missional books about Muslims: first, those that report on the global church movement, second, those that instruct Christians how to share their faith with Muslims, and third, those that teach how to build and maintain positive relationships with Muslims on either an individual or community level. This section reviews the major themes and books since 9/11 in each one of these three types of missional thought.

### The Global Church Movement

The first type of missional book on Islam addresses the global church. By far the most influential evangelical Christian book since 9/11 that reports on the state of the church in the Muslim world is David Garrison’s *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World*.<sup>93</sup> Garrison is a missionary with the Southern Baptist Convention’s International Mission Board. He is a senior spokesman for the rapid, spontaneous growth of the church in the global South, a phenomenon that he calls

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<sup>93</sup> Midlothian Va.: WIGTake Resources, 2004.

“church planting movements.” Garrison reports phenomenological growth of the church in the Muslim world:

More Muslims have come to Christ in the past two decades than at any other time in history. In North Africa, more than 16,000 Berbers turn to Christ over a two-decade period. A Central Asian Church Planting Movement sees 13,000 Kazakhs come to faith in Christ over a decade and a half. Up to 12,000 Kashmiri Muslims turn from jihad to the Prince of Peace. In an Asian Muslim country, more than 150,000 Muslims embrace Jesus and gather in more than 3,000 locally led Isa Jamaats (Jesus Groups).<sup>94</sup>

Garrison’s work highlights the important fact that just because an author is missional in intent does not mean that the author is complacent toward historical tensions Christian-Muslim relations. In fact, Garrison’s work is a prime example of a missional text that assumes that Islam is a cosmic threat to Christianity. The first line of his chapter on the Muslim world reads, “Islam has challenged Christianity for more that 13 centuries. Its system of social laws, called *shari’ah*, have suffocated and virtually eliminated Christianity in much of the region that gave it birth.” He then explains why Islamic *shari’ah* “has been so successful in its contest with Christianity”: *shari’ah* prohibits conversion to Christianity, Islamic marriage laws prohibit divorce and allow polygamy thus accelerating Muslim absorption of non-Muslim people, and during their period of

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 99.

conquest Muslims also provided economic incentives to conversion such as the lifting of the *dhimmi* tax that otherwise was imposed on non-Muslim subjects of Muslim states. For these reasons, Garrison argues, “Islamic *shari’ah* constitutes the only major religious system in the world designed to defeat Christianity.”<sup>95</sup>

Garrison portrays Islam and Christianity as a zero-sum cosmic competition to the last soul. Islam is the greatest “challenge” to Christianity and the only world religion “designed [as if by a fiendish Creator] at defeating” it. *Shari’ah* is in a “contest” with Christianity. Islam is unique, therefore, as a competitor to the church. Importantly, this competition language is not used in reference to any other religion or ethnic group in the book. Garrison does not believe that Islam is destined to actually defeat Christianity, nor does he think that Islam is a threat to the existence or holiness of the Biblical God. But from the language alone, it is distinctly clear that Islam is a threat to the existence and the spread of the church. For that reason, Garrison argues, the rapid growth of the church in the Muslim world is so spectacular.

### **How To Share The Faith**

The word “evangelical” comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, which means, “bringing the good news.” Evangelicals believe that all Christians are called by God to demonstrate and declare the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A 2002 Ethics and Public Policy-Beliefnet poll showed that 89% of evangelicals believe that it is very important to “insist on the truth of the Gospel” with Muslims. Similarly, 83% said it is very important that

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 99-102.

evangelicals “evangelize Muslims” in the U.S. and 81% percent of respondents support evangelism of Muslims abroad.<sup>96</sup> It is unsurprising then that books on “how to share your faith with a Muslim” and how to catalyze new churches among Muslims are popular among evangelicals.

*The Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* notes the gravity of Christian mission to Muslims: “Muslims have been the most resistant faith community to Christian evangelism.”<sup>97</sup> Resistance to the Gospel is the standard characterization of the Muslim world and has been since the birth of the United States. In the words of Al Mohler, “Islam almost surely represents the greatest challenge to Christian evangelism of our times.”<sup>98</sup> The reality of Muslim resistance to Christian evangelism is indelibly on the mind of all evangelicals seeking to win Muslim converts. Many missionaries, scholars, and other leaders have tried to pin down why Muslims are so characteristically resistant to the Christian Gospel.<sup>99</sup> *The Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* gives the

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<sup>96</sup> “Evangelical Views of Islam,” *Beliefnet*, <http://www.beliefnet.com/News/Politics/2003/04/Evangelical-Views-Of-Islam.aspx>.

<sup>97</sup> J. Dudley Woodberry, “Islam, Muslim,” in *Evangelical dictionary of world missions* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 506.

<sup>98</sup> Albert Mohler, “The Challenge of Islam -- A Christian Perspective,” Blog, April 8, 2009, [http://www.albertmohler.com/blog\\_read.php?id=3579](http://www.albertmohler.com/blog_read.php?id=3579).

<sup>99</sup> For example, after more than twenty years of service in Syria, the American protestant progenitor of missions to the Middle East, Henry Jessup, wrote *The Mohammedan missionary problem* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1879), wherein he outlined why mission to Muslims is so unfavorable. For the most part, his reasons have to do with the deprivation of Islamic society. See Kidd, *American Christians and Islam*, 48-51. Jessup’s mentioning of the deprivation of Islamic society as problematic for evangelism to Muslims is reminiscent of the perspective of a German sociologist who was born while Jessup was serving in Syria, namely, Max Weber. Weber posited that Oriental religions actual stifle capitalistic development, as opposed to Calvinistic Protestantism. The foremost study on Weber and Islam on this and other points is Bryan Turner, *Weber and Islam: a critical study* (London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974). Kidd (*American Christians and Islam*, 44) illustrates this belief at work in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. “Some American Christians like Hartford Connecticut pastor Joel Hawes, who visited the Middle East with his friend Rufus Anderson, made a point to distinguish the Turks’ race from their religion. While the Turks were ‘naturally’ a ‘noble race’, Islam destroyed their hope of civilization or salvation. Islam was a ‘dreadful curse’ on the empire.”

following reasons for Muslim resistance. The first reason is sociological: group solidarity leads to persecution of new Christian converts from Islam. Secondly, Islam began after the time of Christ and, thus, directly opposes crucial Christian doctrines the present day inerrancy of the Bible. Thirdly, there are political obstacles: Muslims commonly associate Christianity with the west and look down on Christianity for not embracing the “total way of life” of Islam. Fourthly, association of the church with the West raises numerous cultural barriers.<sup>100</sup> Other missiologists blame the church, arguing that the corruption of the church and neglect of mission to Muslims contributes to Muslim resistance to the Gospel.<sup>101</sup>

Public controversy surrounds the practice of propagating Christianity among Muslims. For instance, after the 2001 tsunami in southeast Asia as well as during the second Iraq War, many American Christian organizations rushed to provide relief to the needy. But they also sought to treat the spiritual needs of the people as well. The impression of critics was that these groups were merely interested in “proselytizing,” or using offers of physical treatment to bait and switch recipients into an evangelistic conversation. Most prominent evangelical groups would fiercely deny that they proselytize in this manner. At the same time, evangelicals are inherently motivated to verbally share the Gospel; for them, after all, it is “good news.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Woodberry, “Islam, Muslim,” 506.

<sup>101</sup> Christian spokesman on Islam Bassam Madany argues that Muslims will not convert unless the Western church distances itself from corrupt, secular Western culture. This is how the church must face what Madany calls “the global challenge of Islam” (“Church Facing Global Challenge of Islam,” *Middle East Resources*, [http://www.unashamedofthegospel.org/church\\_facing\\_global.cfm](http://www.unashamedofthegospel.org/church_facing_global.cfm)).

<sup>102</sup> Mark O’Keefe, “Mixing Iraq Aid and the Gospel Stirs Debate,” *Christianity Today*, March 1, 2003, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/marchweb-only/3-31-52.0.html>. This controversy was manifested in the case of Heather Mercer and Dayna Curry. These two young, single women from a

Several books still popular at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century recognize the public's distaste for proselytism yet still call Christians to evangelize Muslims in a self-sacrificial, loving way. They actively address this distaste, clarifying that they are promoting a more friendship-based evangelism that values sincere care of individuals over mere conversion. Two of those books are McDowell and Zaka's *Muslims and Christians at the Table: Promoting Biblical Understanding Among North American Muslims* and Keith Swartley's *Encountering the World of Islam*. One of the most famous proponents of mission to Muslims in a way that is kept free from manipulative proselytism is Brother Andrew (a moniker). Brother Andrew is a long time evangelical pioneer missionary and founder of the Open Doors International, an international organization serving persecuted Christians. In his last years, he has become an avid champion of a self-sacrificing approach to Christian witness to Muslims. He argues that the true Christian spirit is not polemical and antagonistic; rather, Christians are called to imitate Christ by loving their enemies and seeking to win them to the Kingdom of Christ.<sup>103</sup>

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passionate church in Waco, Texas typify the classic evangelical yearning to "glorify God" by going to Afghanistan as relief workers. Shortly before 9/11, Taliban officials arrested them for proselytism, a crime under Taliban law. Partly due to 9/11 and the impending American invasion, they were freed by U.S. troops in November 2001 and soon thereafter became American icons. They came back to America to testify that they were "prisoners of hope" and that God freed them from the Taliban's snare. See Dayna Curry, Heather Mercer, and Stacy Mattingly, *Prisoners of hope: the story of our captivity and freedom in Afghanistan*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2002).

<sup>103</sup> See, for instance: Brother Andrew and Al Janssen, *Secret believers: what happens when Muslims believe in Christ* (Grand Rapids MI: Fleming H. Revell, 2007); Brother Andrew and Al Janssen, *Light Force: A Stirring Account of the Church Caught in the Middle East Crossfire* (Revell, 2005).



## Contextualization

“Contextualization” has been discussed within evangelical missional literature on Islam at least as much as any other issue. Contextualization is the process of placing the Christian Gospel in the cultural context of the recipient people. The emphasis on contextualization marks a seismic shift in Christian mission to Muslims over the twentieth century. The debate over contextualization is crucial, after all, for at stake for evangelicals is not only ministry effectiveness, but also faithfulness to the Scripture. Contextualization is central to two out of the three central hallmarks of an evangelical: adherence to the Bible as the literal Word of God, and belief that being a Christian yields a unstoppable internal drive for missional activism.<sup>104</sup> The impulse of contextualization is relevance to a particular culture, while the boundaries of contextualization are established by theological syncretism. In the latter twentieth century, the works of Phil Parshall, Dudley Woodberry, Rick Love, Paul Hiebert, John Travis, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism and the *International Journal of Frontier Missions* helped clarify contextualization among Muslims as well as push evangelical missionaries to adopt at least minimal levels of contextualization.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Michael Lindsay gives three marks of an evangelical: the two stated above as well as a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. *Faith in the halls of power: how evangelicals joined the American elite* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

<sup>105</sup> For the sake of brevity, I will only point out the classic works of each author mentioned. Many of these works have been updated into 21<sup>st</sup> century editions: Phil Parshall, *New paths in Muslim evangelism: evangelical approaches to contextualization* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Baker Book House, 1980); J. Dudley Woodberry, *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus road* (Monrovia Calif. USA: MARC Publications, 1989); Rick Love, *Muslims, magic and the kingdom of God : church planting among folk Muslims* (Pasadena Calif.: William Carey Library, 2000); Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological insights for missionaries* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Baker Book House, 1985); Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological reflections on missiological issues* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Baker Books, 1994); Paul Hiebert, *The gospel in human contexts : anthropological explorations for contemporary missions* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009); John Travis, “The C1 to C6 Spectrum,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34, no. 3

The insistence on using the Qur'an as a bridge to the Gospel is a particularly interesting case study to understanding the crucial, and often controversial, part that contextualization plays within evangelical discourse. The Qur'anic bridge method employs verses from the Qur'an as an initial evangelism method; the missionary begins conversation about the Qur'an and then bridges to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The most notable method for Muslim evangelism in this context is what Kevin Greeson calls the CAMEL Method.<sup>106</sup> As a Southern Baptist missionary in the South Asia, Greeson has personally observed a "church planting movement" of thousands of Muslims coming to Christ.<sup>107</sup> There, he witnessed an effective evangelistic method that explains the Biblical view of Jesus and he reshaped the method to fit an acrostic C.A.M.E.L: Jesus was Chosen, Announced by angels, he performed Miracles, and he grants Eternal life. The CAMEL Method explicitly uses the Qur'an to "build a bridge" to the Christian Gospel. The camel theme comes from the Islamic proverb that only the camel knows the 100<sup>th</sup> name of God. This is not the first time this method has been proposed. Another recent, relatively popular book that espouses the same is Fouad Accad's *Building Bridges*:

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(October 1998); Charles Kraft, *Christianity in culture: a study in dynamic Biblical theologizing in cross-cultural perspective* (Maryknoll N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979); Charles Kraft, "Contextualisation Theory in Euro-American Missiology," *The Lausanne Movement*, <http://www.lausanne.org/all-documents/contextualisation-theory.html> The Occasional papers of the Lausanne Movement for World Evangelization are sorted by issue and found here: <http://www.lausanne.org/documents-by-issue.html>. Special note should be paid to the papers on "contextualization" and "Muslims." The International Journal of Frontier Missions has featured numerous articles on missions to Muslims, specifically on the topic of contextualization. See <http://www.ijfm.org/archives.htm> for a listing of their past issues.

<sup>106</sup> Kevin Greeson, *The Camel: How Muslims Are Coming to Faith in Christ!* (WIGTake Resources, 2007).

<sup>107</sup> The endorsement of Phil Parshall, one of the most all around respected missionaries to Muslims in the late twenty first century, is a worthy example of the level of excitement within some evangelical circles over the Camel method: "Seldom have I ever been so enthused about a book as I am about this inside peek at one of the most extraordinary acts of the Holy Spirit ever chronicled regarding Muslim evangelism." "The CAMEL Method," <http://camelmethod.com/OthersSay.html>.

*Christianity and Islam*.<sup>108</sup> Greeson and Accad's use of the Qur'an in evangelism is highly controversial within evangelical circles. Some critique this method as overly pragmatic and hermeneutically suspect.<sup>109</sup> Others are concerned with the apparent endorsement of what missiologists call "insider movements" within the Muslim world – these are "movements" of so-called Muslims who have primary allegiances to Jesus Christ.<sup>110</sup> Finally, some others decry the Qur'anic bridge as an abandonment of biblical methods and even deceitful.<sup>111</sup>

These critiques reveal the concern within evangelicalism for adherence to the literal teaching of the Bible, a hallmark of evangelicalism. In this way, the debate over the Qur'anic bridge actually reveals as much about evangelicalism as it does about the actual debate at hand. Using the Qur'an as a "bridge to the Gospel" appears all too much like syncretism in the sense of endorsing uninspired words as somehow a pathway to salvation. In this way, the debate over the Qur'anic bridge rehashes the questions that originally led to the formation of modern evangelicalism in the early twentieth century. Modern evangelicalism grew out desire to adhere to the Bible as the absolute Word of God while also not fearing, but engaging head on, contemporary culture. Billy Graham, Harold Ockenga, Kenneth Kantzer, and Carl F. H. Henry, among many others, rejected

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<sup>108</sup> Colorado Springs Colo.: NavPress, 1997.

<sup>109</sup> Andy Johnson, "Pragmatism, Pragmatism Everywhere!" *9 Marks* 6, no. 4 (August 2009): 9-15; Doug Coleman, "Book Review: The Camel," *9 Marks* 6, no. 4 (August 2009): 75-80 This edition is available for download at <http://involve.9marks.org/site/DocServer/eJournal200964julaug.pdf?docID=701>.

<sup>110</sup> Among evangelical publications, those that have most covered the insider movements are *Mission Frontiers* magazine, the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, and the *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*.

<sup>111</sup> Jay Smith, "An Assessment of the Insider's Principle Paradigms," *I2 Ministries*, April 2009, [http://www.i2ministries.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=68:jay-smiths-assessment-of-insider-movements-c5-missions-strategies&catid=3:current-news&Itemid=13](http://www.i2ministries.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=68:jay-smiths-assessment-of-insider-movements-c5-missions-strategies&catid=3:current-news&Itemid=13); Deann Alford, "Unapologetic Apologist," *Christianity Today*, June 2008; Stan Guthrie, "Plus: Deconstructing Islam," *Christianity Today*, September 9, 2002, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/september9/32.37.html>.

the oppositionist and separatist currents within their coreligionists. They believed that Christians should engage the world on the world's turf, rather than retreat and demand the world's acquiescence. The controversy over the Camel Method resurfaces the same question: is engaging with Muslims on their turf tantamount to syncretism or is it merely a strategy to find common ground with Muslims as a gateway to sharing the Christian Gospel? In a roundabout way, missional engagement with Islam has again brought out fundamental tensions within evangelicalism, tensions which some believe will determine the ultimate fate of the movement. At least for that reason, evangelicals should appreciate Christian-Muslim engagement.

#### *Evangelism as a deterrent to the growth of Islam*

One unforeseen conclusion of my research is that evangelicals often think, talk, and write about evangelism to Muslims as if it is a defensive weapon against the spread of Islam. In this way, mission is as much about “stopping Islam” as it is “reaching Muslims for Christ.” A February 2002 *Christianity Today* editorial illustrates this point. The title is “Outpaced by Islam?” The subtitle is “The Muslim challenge is growing faster than our Christian outreach.”<sup>112</sup> In other words, Christian outreach is not able to stem the tide of Islamic growth fast enough. This editorial suggests that where Islam grows, it is somehow related to the lack of Christian outreach. This is the zero-sum game assumption that is prevalent within evangelical thought on Islam: where Islam grows, Christianity declines, when Christianity grows, Islam declines. There is little room in popular

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<sup>112</sup> “Outpaced by Islam?,” *Christianity Today*, February 4, 2002, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/february4/26.26.html>.

evangelical thought on Islam for the proliferation of both religions in the same region or for the attribution of nonreligious factors to explain the shifting demographics of Islam and Christianity.

### **How To Build Positive Relationships With Muslims**

The third type of book within the missional category explains how to build healthy relationships with Muslims, either on an individual or corporate scale. These healthy relationships are formed out of mutual respect and dialogue. Evangelism is not the principal concern in these relationships (as in missional literature), but rather, healthy cohabitation.

#### *Respecting Islam*

Evangelicals disagree on how much to respect Islam as a religious system. “Respect” connotes irenic engagement with Islam. The main twenty-first century evangelical leaders pushing for greater respect of Islam and Muslims are Dudley Woodberry, long time professor at Fuller Theological Seminary’s School of Intercultural Studies, Keith Swartley, creator of the adult education course, “Encountering the World of Islam,” Colin Chapman, and Timothy George, Dean of Beeson Divinity School. These leaders try to strike a balance between polemical antagonism toward Islam and Muslims on the one hand and religious syncretism on the other. In that way, one can trace their lineage of thought back to Francis of Assisi, Raymond Lull, Henry Martyn, Samuel Zwemer, and Kenneth Cragg. On the other end are those that say that Islam is not worthy

of respect; Christians are only called to respect Muslims, not Islam. Al Mohler, the very influential conservative president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is an evangelical statesman who holds this view. In his article, “R-E-S-P-E-C-T: Should Christians ‘Respect’ Other Religions?” he responds to Pope Benedict XVI’s May 2009 speech in Jordan where the Pope apparently spoke of his “deep respect” of Islam. Mohler criticizes the Pope for insinuating his respect for Islam. Mohler argues that we can respect Muslims as fellow human beings and as contributors to global welfare, but we absolutely cannot respect a religion that draws people away from the triune God and to hell. The best way to “respect” Muslims is to share the Gospel with them.<sup>113</sup> Other evangelical authors agree with Mohler: Christians must support evangelism to Muslims but remain extremely sensitive to any measure of condoning Islam or Islamic culture.<sup>114</sup> Jennifer Bryson, director of the Islam and Civil Society Project of the Witherspoon Institute, falls in the middle between those who push for either respect or vilification of Islam. She explains the difference between “appraisal respect” and “recognition respect.” Appraisal respect grants approval of a thing while recognition respect acknowledges the thing’s existence. She also pushes for the difference between respecting Islam versus respecting Muslims. Focusing on respecting Muslims, rather than “Islam”, keeps attention on human dignity rather than abstract evils.<sup>115</sup> According to Bryson, it would behoove Christian spokesmen on Islam to adopt the language of “appraisal” versus

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<sup>113</sup> Albert Mohler, “R-E-S-P-E-C-T: Should Christians ‘Respect’ Other Religions?,” Blog, May 14, 2009, [http://www.albertmohler.com/blog\\_read.php?id=3799](http://www.albertmohler.com/blog_read.php?id=3799).

<sup>114</sup> For instance, see John MacArthur, *Terrorism, Jihad, and the Bible: a response to the terrorist attacks* (Nashville: W Pub. Group, 2001) and Richardson, *Secrets of the Koran*.

<sup>115</sup> Jennifer Bryson, “What Does it Mean to Respect Islam?: The Witness of Soraya M.,” *The Witherspoon Institute: Public Discourse*, June 26, 2009, <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2009/06/376>.

“recognition” respect in order to adequately describe distaste towards a religious system but deep value for human dignity and the right to choose religions.

There have indeed been a few joint statements that attempt to promote better relations with the Muslim world. First, there is the A Common Word/Loving God and Neighbor initiative, which is addressed in full in Chapter 5. Secondly, the Institute on Religion and Democracy wrote and released a guide for churches on Christian-Muslim dialogue. This is a solidly irenic, evangelical set of “dos and don’ts” that emphasizes respect for Islam and Muslims, the use of appropriate language, sincere engagement between the parties with the issues that divide Christians and Muslims, and the avoidance of over simplification.<sup>116</sup> Thirdly, the “Grace and Truth Task Force” is a “global network of Christians who love, serve, and live among Muslims.” The Task Force has produced “An Affirmation” of their convictions as well as “An Exposition” of that affirmation in fuller detail. The authors as well as their signatories all embrace a respectful, missional perspective on Islam and Muslims. In other words, mission is the primary force shaping their thought on Islam. In these two documents, they affirm nine “Biblical guidelines that can enable Jesus’ followers to serve as his representatives in relationship with Muslims of every persuasion.”<sup>117</sup> To sum up, they are passionate for a gracious and truthful approach to mission among Muslims.

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<sup>116</sup> Alan Wisdom, “Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Guide for Churches” (Institute on Religion & Democracy, May 2003), <http://www.theird.org/Page.aspx?pid=1082>.

<sup>117</sup> 1. Be faithful to God’s Truth- the whole truth. 2. Be Jesus-Centered in our Communication. 3. Be truthful and gracious in our words and witness. 4. Be wise in our words and witness. 5. Be respectful and bold in our witness. 6. Be prudent in our “Google-ized” world. 7. Be persistent in our call for religious freedom. 8. Be peaceable and uncompromising in our dialogue. 9. Be loving toward all. At the time of this writing, these documents and the list of their signatories are unpublished.

Other leaders engage in less public, but equally valuable, acts to express their sincere appreciation of Islam and Muslims. The evangelical president of Fuller Theological Seminary, Richard Mouw, for instance, expressed that the Muslims he knew motivated him to fast during the season of Ramadan. He publicly called other evangelical Christians to do the same.<sup>118</sup>

Rick Warren has modeled most prominently how to engage Muslims in a more irenic manner. Warren, the pastor of Saddleback church in Lake Forest, California, is often acclaimed as the heir to Billy Graham as “America’s minister.”<sup>119</sup> He has an engaging approach to promoting social welfare (physical and spiritual), including speaking on behalf of issues such as poverty, disease, and the epidemic of poor leadership. The foremost example of his approach to the topic of Islam is his 2009 keynote speech for the Muslim Public Affairs Council annual convention. In his opening remarks, he declared, “I love Muslims!”<sup>120</sup> While appreciative of Muslims and Islam, Warren’s ambition is clearly missional – he wants Muslims to know and follow Jesus Christ. At the same time, he argues that disagreement with Muslims should not keep any Christian from loving Muslims.

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<sup>118</sup> Richard Mouw, “An Evangelical Fasts During Ramadan,” *Beliefnet*, <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Christianity/Protestant/Evangelical/An-Evangelical-Fasts-During-Ramadan.aspx>.

<sup>119</sup> David Van Biema et al., “TIME: 25 Most Influential Evangelicals Photo Essay: Rick Warren,” *Time*, February 7, 2005, <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101050207/photoessay/>.

<sup>120</sup> *Dr. Rick Warren Keynote Address at 2008 MPAC Convention* (8th Annual Muslim Public Affairs Council Convention, 2008), <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-2072249736122706302>.



### *Interfaith Dialogue*

A minority of evangelical books in this category explicitly endorse some sort of interfaith dialogue. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that interfaith dialogue sounds can sound too close to theological syncretism to a conservative evangelical ear. Evangelicals are most concerned about world change and evangelism, rather than mere dialogue. In a 2007 *Christianity Today* poll, nearly two thirds said that the true purpose of interfaith dialogue is evangelism, though they also want to gain understanding.<sup>121</sup> I have experienced this same dynamic in my own encounter. Over the past three years, I have catalyzed and led an adult education course on Islam titled after Keith Swartley's 2005 book, *Encountering the World of Islam*. I have had more than 250 college students and adults take this course from over thirty churches across several evangelical denominations. This twelve-week course walks through the history of Islam, Islamic culture and theology, and a proper, Biblical response to Islam. Throughout the course, participants are expected to meet with a Muslim at least twice and go on a mosque visit. In two out of the three years of my leadership the course has featured three different Muslim speakers. I have found that most Christians register for the course out of a desire to just "share the Gospel" with Muslims. They want to know the simple steps to "win" a Muslim to Christ.

Perhaps the most influential book in the post 9/11 era on dialogue with Muslims was actually published in 1999: *Muslims and Christians at the Table: Promoting Biblical Understanding Among North American Muslims*. McDowell and Zaka endorse twenty-

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<sup>121</sup> Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, 120.

four different types of evangelism to Muslims.<sup>122</sup> They especially highlight one, a method of interfaith dialogue called “meetings for better understanding.” These are friendly meetings between groups of Muslims and Christians. In each meeting speakers discuss a topic relevant to both faiths, such as the unity of God, the nature of Jesus Christ, prayer and fasting, and so on. After speaker presentations, there is a time of question and answer. Each meeting is civilized and respectful of both faiths. Often a reception with food and conversation follows the formal meeting. McDowell and Zaka claim that these types of meetings have taken place in many states and even abroad in countries like Liberia and Egypt. McDowell and Zaka do not hide their ambition for these meetings: understanding of both faiths that lead to the sharing of the Christian gospel of Jesus Christ.

Does the ambition of many Christians in interfaith dialogue to evangelize compromise the interfaith dialogue effort? If one, quite unreasonably, expects absolutely objective dialogue, then any evangelical ambition defiles the dialogue. I would suggest, however, that such a standard is unreasonable. Religious people have religious motives. It is unreasonable to assume that evangelical Christians will be entirely “unevangelical”, or that God-fearing Muslims desiring to publicly talk about their faith will abandon the central Islamic doctrine of *da’wah*, the invitation of others to Islam. Religious dialogues should include all aspects of each religion. Evangelism (*da’wah* in Islam) is central to

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<sup>122</sup> They are Bible correspondence courses, book rooms or book tables, children’s Bible club in the home, church-mosque relationships, counseling, debates, dialogue, email chat rooms, friendship evangelism, hospitality and family evangelism, house churches, international dinners, mail evangelism, media evangelism, meetings for better understanding, one on one evangelism, prayer evangelism, preaching, prison ministry, reconciliation ministry, refugee ministry, small group Bible and Qur’an studies, door to door surveys, and team evangelism. McDowell, *Muslims and Christians at the table*, 173-186.

both faiths. Therefore, evangelism/*da'wah* should be discussed and even respected as a motivator for dialogue. While there might be hidden or explicit agendas held in interfaith dialogues, the dialogical process itself is inherently valuable for interfaith relations. Properly structured, dialogue can ensure dialogue the value of the theological intercourse. McDowell and Zaka propose having “Meetings for Better Understanding” between Muslim and Christian communities. In these meetings, equal time is structured for both speakers and questions to make sure that not one side dominates the discussion. In fact, the true face of religion is often revealed when a person evangelizes. A healthy dialogical process is ensured not by limiting motivations or topics, but rather, by the mutual respect for the other which binds the two religious groups together in a mutual process of learning and persuasion.<sup>123</sup>

### **Conclusion to the Missional Section**

In his classic historical study on evangelicalism in Britain, David Bebbington lists the four characteristics of evangelicalism: *crucicentricism* (focus on Christ and the meaning of his cross), *conversionism* (lives need to be changed), *activism* (focus on doing), and *biblicism* (the Bible is the Word of God).<sup>124</sup> Missional literature is unique because it stems from the combination of all of these characteristics. This literature aims to mobilize its audience to go and do the work of God on earth. That work includes

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<sup>123</sup> For a very helpful overview of data and commentary on the state of dialogue between the Muslim world and the West, see Community of west and Islam Dialogue (C-100), “Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue” (World Economic Forum, January 2008), [www.weforum.org/pdf/C100/Islam\\_West.pdf](http://www.weforum.org/pdf/C100/Islam_West.pdf).

<sup>124</sup> David W Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, New edition. (Routledge, 1989), 2-3.

participating in the global church movement, sharing the Gospel of Jesus with others, and building positive relationships of mutual respect with others.

## CHAPTER 4: THE CHALLENGE OF ISLAM

The dominant theme within evangelical Christian thought on Islam is that Islam poses a cosmic challenge to Christianity. The first, and most common word used in books, articles, podcasts, speeches, and websites is “challenge.” Note the following brief list of titles published in 2001 and afterward: *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam*, by Chapman; *The Challenge of Islam: Encounters in Interfaith Dialogue*, by Pratt; *Islam: the Challenge to the Church and its Mission*, by Sookhdeo; and *Facing the Muslim Challenge*, by Gilchrist. Other words that emphasize the challenge motif in evangelical literature are “threat”, “clash”, and “rival.” These words appear in all of the different classifications of evangelical writing on Islam. Evangelicals view Islam as both a challenge to the Christian church and to western civilization.

To be clear, Christians refer to Islam both as a challenge and a challenger. A challenge is something difficult to do or something new that one has to learn to do. Challenges are inert, passive, and often temporary. In this sense, evangelizing Muslims through word and deed can be a challenge, but the more practice makes it much more easy and comfortable, until it is no longer a challenge. A “challenger” is a competitor – a conscious Other to conquer. In this way the challenge is not so ephemeral. This section argues that while the perception of Islam as a challenge is present in evangelical thought, the dominant theme within evangelical thought is that Islam a challenger to Christianity.

Evangelicals think of Muslims not as simply challenges (to be won over to Christ), but as *challengers* on the stage of human salvation. If Muslims are challengers to Christians, and if Islam is a challenger to Christianity, then that means that both Islam

and Christianity are vying for the same thing: human souls and world domination. In fact, evangelicals overwhelmingly believe that Islam has a grand, coordinated agenda for world domination. This agenda includes converting the non-Muslim world to Islam, influencing American policy and culture, and immigrating to the West. All in all, Islam poses an existential challenge to Christianity. The roots of this challenge go back thousands of years. As a result, Christianity and Islam are in a zero-sum competition to the last soul.

### **The “Islamic Agenda”**

The belief among many evangelicals that the world’s Muslims have a unified agenda for world domination enhances the challenger theme. While serving as Vice President of the Southern Baptist Convention, William Wagner even published a book on this topic, *How Islam Plans To Change the World*. He unabashedly argues, “Islam has been successful in having a global strategy. Islam is the only major world religion with a megastrategy.”<sup>1</sup> Christians differ as to what they believe constitutes this strategy, but a surprisingly large proportion of evangelical thought relies on the assumption that Muslims are part of a single “murderous organic whole.”<sup>2</sup>

This obsession by evangelicals on a so-called Islamic agenda often influences evangelicalism in the direction of fundamentalism. Stephen Spector shows how a common thread within fundamentalism of any sort is that it “represents an attempt by true

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<sup>1</sup> Kregel Publications, 2004, 209.

<sup>2</sup> Spector uses this phrase in describing the views of Stan Goodenough.

believers to resist assaults on their faith and social values.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, the greater the threat, the greater devolution into fundamentalism. This phenomenon is clearly manifest within evangelicalism. The more that evangelicals can narrow the vision of the massively diverse Islamic world into a discrete “Islamic agenda”, the more they can craft appropriate responses that may shield them from the threat of the growth of Islam. As the threat of Islam grows, evangelicals increasingly retreat into themselves. A simple example of this tactic at work is the association of all Islamic terrorists with each other. Although different Muslim extremist groups around the world have varying agendas, religious and non-religious, evangelicals regularly associate them together into one category, namely, “Islamic terrorists.”

There are several ways in which a belief in an “Islamic agenda” supports the idea of an Islam as a cosmic challenger to Christianity in the evangelical mind. First, if Islam has a global agenda, America must be at the forefront of its vision for domination. Evangelical writers seem well aware that their own society falls into *Dar al-Harb* (House of War). Thus, Islam poses not only a religious, but also a civilizational challenge to *American* evangelicals. A passage from Al Mohler, the president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, illustrates this point. This passage is his reaction to the deference that President Obama showed to the Muslim world in his first visit to Turkey as president of the United States:

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2008), 38.

I criticize President Obama, not for stating that America is not at war with Islam, but for failing to be honest in clarifying that we do face a great civilizational challenge in Islam. Islam is, in effect, the single most vital competitor to Western ideals of civilization on the world scene. The logic of Islam is to bring every square inch of this planet under submission to the rule of the Qur'an. Classical Islam divides the world into the "World of Islam" and the "World of War." In this latter world the struggle to bring the society under submission to the Qur'an is still ongoing.”<sup>4</sup>

For Mohler the connection between the global ambitions of Islam, the notion of *Dar al-Harb*, and the civilizational challenge of Islam is clear.

In their books, evangelicals typically refer to one of three possible tactics of the “Islamic agenda” to gain world domination. The first imagined tactic is conversion of non-Muslims to Islam. Secondly, Muslims are envisioned as participating in a coordinated effort to influence Western culture and policy for their own ends. The third tactic is immigration. The more Muslims there are in Western society, the greater the social and political influence.

#### *Strategy 1: Convert the West!*

Evangelical Christians on the whole are very anxious about Islamic evangelism to non-Muslims. Islam has grown rapidly especially among African Americans. America

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<sup>4</sup> Albert Mohler, “The Challenge of Islam -- A Christian Perspective,” Blog, April 8, 2009, [http://www.albertmohler.com/blog\\_read.php?id=3579](http://www.albertmohler.com/blog_read.php?id=3579).



evangelicalism's main example of ministry to African American Muslims in America is Carl Ellis. Ellis runs a ministry in Chattanooga, Tennessee that equips the church with resources for reaching Muslims with the Gospel. Ellis's target flock are African Americans converted to Islam. Perhaps because of his exposure to many converts to Islam, Ellis believes that Islam is "the most serious threat to the church in America." In *The Changing Face of Islam in America*, Ellis and his co-author, describe what they call the "Muslim missionary strategy" in the West. This Muslim missionary strategy, or *da'wah*, may be divided into two categories. First, there is "indirect *da'wah*": they relate this to the Christian practice of "lifestyle evangelism." This is what they call "Islamization": educating Muslims and non-Muslims alike in the lifestyle of Islam. Practically, they say, this can take the form of teaching Arabic, teaching cooking, opening Islamic schools, distributing books, and so on. An example for them of an organization engaging in indirect *da'wah* is the International Institute of Islamic Thought. Secondly, there is "direct *da'wah*": this kind of *da'wah* is more direct about its aim to convert non-Muslims to Islam. It includes open-air preaching, holistic outreach programs, campus rallies and classes, study groups, letter distribution, summer training camps, radio and television programming, and literature distribution. According to Ellis and Poston, an organization that often engages in direct *da'wah* is the Muslim Student Association.<sup>5</sup>

The Caner brothers have also contributed to the idea that Muslims have a grand agenda in the West. On a video interview with evangelical leader John Ankerberg, the Caner brothers opine, "Every 24 hours, 64000 people become Muslims and begin to

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<sup>5</sup> Larry Poston and Carl F. Ellis, *The changing face of Islam in America: understanding and reaching your Muslim neighbor* (Camp Hill, PA: Horizon Books, 2000), 44, 56-63.

follow the teachings of Muhammad.” As for Muslims in America, “Here in the United States, they have a goal of proselytizing every American family by 2013.” In response to the question “Does the Qur’an support the claims of world domination?” they respond affirmatively, “They continue to fight because they believe in world domination.”<sup>6</sup>

Some evangelicals argue that this strategy of conversion is secretive. Only at the right time will Muslims reveal their true agenda. Ralph Stice’s prediction of what the world will be like under the rule of the Islamic Mahdi illustrates the perception of a secretive agenda of conversion. He tells a sensationalist story of how people will wake up to the sound of the call to prayer and *shari’ah* law will be in effect in America. “What no one in Washington had allowed themselves to acknowledge was that Muslims do not think like Americans.” Indeed, this will be the occupation of America for Allah.<sup>7</sup> The film *Obsession* similarly argues that the Islamic fundamentalist agenda has secretly infiltrated America. One of the film’s main commentators, Glenn Jenvey, a self-proclaimed intelligence researcher, makes this point: “We are living with them, they are here, they’re not outside our borders, they are here.” Another commentator in the film, British historian Sir Martin Gilbert, argues, “Islamic fundamentalism is a global network and a global problem... people don’t want to feel that this is part of a single threat,

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<sup>6</sup> In Ankerberg’s own words, the main topic of his show is, “Where will Islam take the world in the future.” Since, therefore, Ankerberg believes that there is a singular direction to the progression of the Muslim world, he asks the reasonable follow up question, “What are the consequences for the world, what will we be facing if these things happen, if the curve continues to go up in this way?” The Caner’s respond: “If you want to know what Islam is doing, look to see what the Wahhabis are doing, what the Saudis are doing and what’s going on across the world where now more than two dozen countries have accepted the Islamic Republic, Islam as an official religion, within the last two dozen years.” Therefore, unless the Christian world does something drastic, Emir Caner argues that future generations will have to engage in the “battle” against militant Islam. “The John Ankerberg Show,” *Ankerberg Theological Research Institute*, <http://www.ankerberg.com/>.

<sup>7</sup> Ralph W. Stice, *From 9/11 To 666: The Convergence of Current Events, Biblical Prophecy, and the Vision of Islam* (ACW Press, 2005), 12, 19.

because if you come to that conclusion, and I'm sure its the correct conclusion, then you have to do something about it.”<sup>8</sup>

One of the secret sub-strategies presumably used by Muslims to achieve their agenda is to marry non-Muslim women. Don Richardson argues that Muslims gain influence is by infiltrating Christian colleges and churches expressly to seduce Christian women. Richardson notes that his information is based on a single story of a meeting with a Pakistani Christian friend who met a “young, good-looking man in London” who apparently had a career of deceit with the Muslim Brotherhood. Intentionally seducing Christian young girls for the sake of the propagation of Islam, he says, a “secret Muslim strategy.”<sup>9</sup>

Evangelical Christians have proposed other conversion strategies of Muslims in the West. In addition to the strategies given above, other commonly cited Muslim conversion strategies include a coordinated effort to build mosques in the West and distribute the Qur'an<sup>10</sup> and contextualization of Islam to Western culture. For instance, one author notes that Muslims gives themselves western Christian names such as Paul in order to better seduce non-Muslims to convert.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Wayne Kopping et al., *Obsession radical Islam's war against the West*, 2006, <http://www.obsessionthemovie.com/>.

<sup>9</sup> Don Richardson, *Secrets of the Koran*, Revised edition. (Regal Books, 2003), 174.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>11</sup> Mark A. Gabriel, *Islam and Terrorism: What the Quran Really Teaches About Christianity, Violence and the Goals of the Islamic Jihad* (Creation House, 2002), 44, 46.

### *Strategy 2: Shape Cultural and Policy*

The second major Islamic strategy to gain global domination is to “Islamize” Western culture and policy. Thus, many evangelicals are extremely sensitive to Islamic influence of American policy and culture. Evangelicals are, therefore, not surprised at the growing influence of Muslim policy advocacy organizations such as the Muslim Public Affairs Council and the Council for American-Islamic Relations. Islamic activism is almost always perceived as manipulative and threatening.<sup>12</sup>

### *Strategy 3: Immigrate*

The third Muslim strategy is immigration. Placing immigrants in western democracies is presented as a “strategy” of Muslims to establish a “totalitarian, global, Islamic government”: “the goal is to have enough Muslim inhabitants to influence European and North American governments against attacking Islamic terrorism.”<sup>13</sup> According to evangelical missiologist Don Richardson, some Muslims might not even be aware of their part in Islam’s coordinated takeover of the world. He argues that the first Islamic strategy for world domination is to exploit massive immigration – legal and illegal – of Muslim immigrants into western nations: “a major supremacist Muslim strategy, then, is first to get large numbers of Muslims in a immigrants – including

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<sup>12</sup> “Occasionally I am asked whether or not I perceive Islam to be a ‘threat’ to the world in general or to Christianity in particular. My answer is always an ambivalent ‘yes and no.’ Muslims could indeed be considered a threat to certain aspects of the American lifestyle because of their increasing activism in their political, economic and religious spheres of the modern world.” Larry Poston and Carl F. Ellis, *The changing face of Islam in America: understanding and reaching your Muslim neighbor* (Camp Hill, PA: Horizon Books, 2000), 65.

<sup>13</sup> Grant Jeffrey, *The next world war: what prophecy reveals about extreme Islam and the West*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs Colo.: Waterbrook Press, 2006), 102.

Muslim immigrants who are unaware of the infiltration scheme – and then to help them gain advantages in every possible way over the original society of the nation to be parasitized.” In other words, “Naïve Europeans who *think* they are showing tolerance to a mere religion are actually inviting a very potent *political* invader into their societies.”<sup>14</sup> Richardson calls this a “behind the scenes” takeover.

### **Existential Challenge**

In the evangelical mind, Islam is an existential challenger to Christianity in the sense that there are cosmic forces at play in pitting Islam against Christianity, and Christianity against Islam. In other words, Christianity and Islam are providentially destined for rivalry. John Gilchrist and Mateen Ellass provide two particularly impassioned statements describing Islam as an existential challenger to Christianity. Gilchrist’s opens his 1999 book as follows:

Great conflicts come and go but one, which has endured for nearly fourteen centuries, appears destined to remain until the end. It is the classic battle - a universal one which outlives every generation. It is the struggle between Islam and Christianity for the souls of all who live on earth. Although mostly unrecognized, it is probably the supreme contest - one which tackles the greatest of issues, namely the very purpose of human existence and its ultimate destiny. Each has its own figurehead who is claimed to be God’s final messenger to all

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<sup>14</sup> Richardson, *Secrets of the Koran*, 169, 170.

mankind - Jesus Christ the Savior of the world or Muhammad the universal Prophet to the nations. Each has its own mission - the spread of the Gospel to the ends of the earth or the establishment of an *ummah* (community) which covers the globe. Each, likewise, has its own conviction of its ultimate triumph over all the philosophies, religions and powers that have challenged human allegiance. It is only natural that they should come into conflict.<sup>15</sup>

Gilchrist's argument is not unique among American evangelicals. Edmond, Oklahoma based evangelical pastor Mateen Ellass makes clear Islam's existential juxtaposition with Christianity:

Both movements have a mandate of their founder to reach the world with their message. Of all the major world religions, these two are far and away the most mission-minded. Further, each is exclusivist when it comes to the matter of salvation, teaching that the way hearers respond to its message alone will determine their destinies in heaven or hell. Both Islam and Christianity believe that the hope of the world is tied exclusively to their respective, yet contradictory plans of salvation, so that to believe one religion is necessarily to reject the other. *For this crucial reason, Christianity and Islam can never be mere competitors, like Coke and Pepsi, but rather remain rivals on a cosmic scale, for the stakes are of eternal consequence. Because there can be no compromise on such issues of*

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<sup>15</sup> John Gilchrist, *Facing the Muslim Challenge* (Life Challenge Africa, 2002), 1, <http://www.answering-islam.org/Gilchrist/Challenge/index.html>.

*ultimate importance, the two faiths will always remain adversarial with regard to their goals.*<sup>16</sup>

Gilchrest and Ellass both believe that the relationship between Islam and Christianity is unique. There is something more crucial, indeed, more cosmic, at stake in the relationship between Christianity and Islam than in Christianity's relationship with other world religions. This unique relationship, in the minds of many evangelicals, is a product of a number of teachings shared by orthodox Christianity and orthodox Islam that stand in direct contradiction to each other. These different teachings consistently reappear as evangelicals grapple with the cosmic rivalry between Islam and Christianity. These teachings are not only different between the two religions, they are diametrically opposed to each other.<sup>17</sup> First, and perhaps most importantly, both religions have a global mandate. Second, although the interpretation of the texts and their exact doctrinal meanings differ within the respective faith communities, both religions claim at least minimal exclusivity in salvation. Thirdly, both religions contain mandates for individual and corporate activism. Fourthly, the respective means of salvation directly contradict each other. Evangelical Christians believe that eternal salvation is accessed by faith and not by works. Conversely, orthodox Islam teaches that although salvation is a work of

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<sup>16</sup> Italics added. Mateen Ellass, *Understanding the Koran: A Quick Christian Guide to the Muslim Holy Book* (Zondervan, 2004), 157-158.

<sup>17</sup> The evangelical scholar and Gambian convert to Christianity from Islam, Lamin Sanneh, has a different point of view. He maintains that Christianity and Islam are [existentially] united, perhaps, less by the things they have in common than by what divides them. Sanneh's point is that "a common faith in God aggravates mutual jealousy" and that their nearness yields their constant conflict, especially over matters of theology -- indeed, the matters that I address in this section. "Evangelicals, Islam, and Humanitarian Aid: A Conversation with Lamin Sanneh," *Center Conversations*, no. 26.

God alone and is His choice, though good works are critical to achieving higher favor with God. Lastly, each religion claims to be the ultimate and final revelation from God.<sup>18</sup> These characteristics are some of the most precious attributes of evangelical Christianity for evangelicals. Islam is the only world religion that diametrically contradicts all of these characteristics. In this sense, it is not surprising that in the mind of evangelicals, the conflict between the two faiths exists at the cosmic level.<sup>19</sup>

### *Islam and the Devil*

Identifying Islam with the devil enhances the idea that Islam is an existential threat to Christianity. This identification casts Islam as part of a long history of the devil's inventions. Perhaps the most influential book connecting Islam and Allah to ancient spiritual forces of evil is George Otis Jr's, *The Last of the Giants*.<sup>20</sup> Although this book was written before the period of analysis in this paper (post-2001), it was so influential in shaping Christian thinking on Islam that it must be mentioned.<sup>21</sup> The premise of his book is that spiritual forces are linked with geographical areas and these

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<sup>18</sup> I am indebted to Dudley Woodberry for outlining the exact ways that Islam opposes Christianity. Comparative Witness: Christian Mission and Islamic Da'wah. *The Review of Faith and International Affairs*. V. 7, Number 1. Spring 2009. 67-72.

<sup>19</sup> Reza Safa notes, "Islam stands at the opposite pole of Christianity." *Inside Islam: Exposing and Reaching the World of Islam* (Creation House, 1997), 56; Emir Caner and Ergun Caner argue, "A radical dichotomy exists between evangelical Christianity and Islamic faith...Islam began as a reaction to the Christian God, either as understood or as misconceived." *More Than a Prophet: an Insider's Response to Muslim Beliefs About Jesus and Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003), 21, 23; In another book, the Caners opine that Islam, "at its very core, [is] a repudiation of Christianity." *Out of the Crescent Shadows: Leading Muslim Women into the Light of Christ* (New Hope Publishers (AL), 2003), 29.

<sup>20</sup> Tarrytown N.Y.: Chosen Books, 1991.

<sup>21</sup> George Otis Jr. is most well known for documenting the extraordinary work of God all over the world. According to his website biographical statement, he has traveled and ministered in over 100 nations of the world, and has served as a senior associate with the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and co-coordinator of the United Prayer Track of the A.D. 2000 & Beyond Movement. This speaks of his influence in the prophetic and missional evangelical circles.



forces reappear throughout time even in different incarnations. Otis clarifies that the fallen spirits do not have geographical or ethnic affinities, they are merely more pronounced among certain peoples or in certain lands due to spiritual beachheads that have been established by a previous generation.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, one can verifiably map the spiritual realm, a process that Otis calls “spiritual mapping.” Otis’s consultancy group has led consultations all over the world on spiritual mapping and significantly influenced American evangelicals in the discipline of prayer intercession, “prayer walking,” and world evangelization strategies.<sup>23</sup> The basic meaning of spiritual mapping is that Christians can tap into the unseen spiritual reality and will thereby improve their evangelism efforts. There are languages, principles, and protocols of the spiritual realm that the average Christian evangelizer should seek to learn and if a Christian learns these, they will be better equipped to engage in the spiritual battle.<sup>24</sup> The aim of this battle is to “bind the spiritual strongmen.”

The growth of Islam, according to Otis, is not due primarily to sociological factors, but rather due to the spiritual empowerment of Islam by spiritual forces of old. Islam, according to Otis, was born in an age and land of superstition and idolatry. Of all the enemies of Christianity, Islam is the most vehement:

If, with their chameleon-like natures, materialism and Hinduism represent more insidious threats to the mission of the Church, Islam is a no-nonsense locomotive.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>23</sup> See René Holvast's helpful dissertation on the meaning and influence of "spiritual mapping": “Spiritual Mapping: The Turbulent Career of a Contested American Missionary Paradigm, 1989-2005” (University of Utrecht, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Praying with Power* (Destiny Image, 2008).

Rather than relying on subtlety, the religion of Muhammad stalks its objectives through relentless force. Of all the spiritual superpowers facing the Church at the end of the twentieth century, the strongest, and certainly the most visible, of these is Islam.<sup>25</sup>

Islam is, in other words, the most formidable opponent to Christianity. In fact, Otis says that there is “striking evidence” that the global headquarters of Satan is the Middle East: “The serpent of Eden has established a global command and control center atop the oily residue of the Garden’s once flourishing vegetation and animal life.” For that reason, present day Iraq, ancient Mesopotamia, have the greatest concentration of evil spirits in the world. Iraq (Babylon) is the “favorite dwelling place of demonic hosts”, and Iran is these hosts’ “workshop.”<sup>26</sup>

Otis, along with others like Peter Wagner and Mike Evans, helped make “spiritual mapping” commonplace in evangelical literature on Islam. The language of “spiritual strongholds” is common in the writing, teaching, and prayers of evangelical Christians regarding Islam. The ideas of Otis, and others like Peter Wagner and Mike Evans consistently reappears in evangelical thought on Islam.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Otis, *The last of the giants*, 58.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 99, 103, 121.

<sup>27</sup> As an illustration, evangelical pastor Frank Frangipane wrote the following in 2005: Remember, Iraq is the area on earth where Lucifer first sidled up to Eve in the Garden of Eden. It was also from this region that ancient Babylon was first conceived and its idolatrous influence spread into the rest of the world. One might say that Iraq holds a unique place for the devil. It is his longest-held territory on earth, and he is not going to slink away quietly.” Francis Frangipane, *This Day We Fight!: Breaking the Bondage of a Passive Spirit* (Chosen, 2005), 40.

Linking Islam with the Devil also opens the door for evangelicals to any level of vilification of Islam. Roland and Michael Back are ambitious in their description of Islam as the final and most ultimate attempt of the devil to take over the world: “Satan has used all of the previous empires to build his power, influence, authority, and control to a peak, and with the Antichrist, he unleashes it all at once.” The Backs posit the connection between the Antichrist and Islam by identifying the great Prostitute of Revelation 17 with Islam. By doing so, they impart incredible cosmological significance on “Islam”, as it is the ultimate attempt of the Devil to destroy Christianity.<sup>28</sup>

### *The Ishmael Connection*

One of the best ways to argue that Islam poses an existential threat to Christianity is by establishing the ancient foundations of Islam’s antagonism against Christianity. This is accomplished by describing Islam as the newest reiteration of the ancient rivalry between Isaac and Ishmael. Connecting Islam to Ishmael is a strategy by no means unique to the post 9/11 context. There are multitudes of references to Ishmael in historical Christian literature on Islam. Indeed, John of Damascus (c. 676-747) called

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<sup>28</sup> The following passage is useful here to illustrate the cognitive impact of linking Islam with the Devil: “Likewise, the ‘Mother of Prostitutes’ designation means this woman [Islam] represents the ultimate in spiritual and religious deception. She is the most destructive, evil, corrupt, and dangerous religion Satan has ever devised. More specifically, she symbolizes the culmination of all of Satan’s demonic attempts at a murderous, yet seductive alternative to worshipping the True God: Jesus.... She is the culmination of thousands of years of work by Satan to construct a religious system. She is fleshly enough to look very good to mankind, and attract lots of followers. She is militant enough to be used to actively make war on the True Faith (physically, spiritually, and morally). She is broad ranging enough in her precepts to allow religious control of the governments of man. She is so constructed that she can be used in Satan’s efforts to bring one man to power for a final thrust at the destruction of the saints and Heaven’s throne.” Roland Back and Michael Back, *What is the Antichrist-Islam Connection?* (Lulu.com, 2007), 158,166.

Islam the “Ishmaelite heresy.”<sup>29</sup> Christian and Latin writers of Islam during the medieval age referred to Muslims using the term Agarenes, from Agar (Hagar) as well as Ismaelite (Ishmaelite).<sup>30</sup> Medieval Christians also sought to assuage their grief and confusion regarding the triumph of Islam in the holy lands during the Crusades by remembering that Islam’s growth and victories were prophesied in Genesis.<sup>31</sup> In response to the Six Day War of June 1957, American dispensationalists like Wilbur Smith and Charles Feinberg of the Bible Theological Seminary of Los Angeles argued that the Ishmaelites (Arab Muslims) have for ages been a great adversary to Christianity and Israel. “Today,” Feinberg opined, “these sons of Ishmael are among the greatest adversaries of the Gospel.”<sup>32</sup> Later, in 1980, German evangelical Martius Baar’s spoke about “Ishmaelite” Islam.<sup>33</sup> In his 1986 book *The Return*, Middle East prophecy expert Mike Evans, who has founded a long list of Christian Zionist organizations, insisted on addressing Muslim Arabs merely as “Ishmael.”<sup>34</sup> Christian Zionist advocate Richard Booker describes the Arab-Israel conflict as “a centuries-old family feud that is spiritual in nature.”<sup>35</sup> Lastly, in 1990, Lebanese Christian author Louis Bahjat Hamada wrote, “There is no doubt in my mind that the promises made to Abraham and Hagar concerning Ishmael becoming ‘a great nation’, were mostly fulfilled with the historic golden age of Islam.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Benjamin-Lee Hegeman, “Beware of Dhimmi Writers,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (October 2007): 2.

<sup>30</sup> Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: the Making of an Image*, reprint. (Oneworld, 1993), 100

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 151, 152.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Kidd, *American Christians and Islam: evangelical culture and Muslims from the colonial period to the age of terrorism* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009), 92-93.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Booker, “Christians and Israel,” *World Watch Daily*, <http://www.watch.org/showart.php3?idx=56386&rtm=/index.html&showsubj=1&mcat=4>

<sup>36</sup> Louis Bahjat Hamada, *Understanding the Arab World* (Thomas Nelson Inc, 1990), 109.

There has been no slowing of this pattern of connecting Ishmael to Islam since 9/11. For instance, immediately after 9/11, John Hagee argued that the Arab/Israeli problem had its origin in the Isaac/Ishmael story: “The root of the problem” is that “the Jews are descended from Isaac; the Arabs are descended from Ishmael.”<sup>37</sup> One of Hagee’s comrades, highly influential Pentecostal pastor Rod Parsley, made the following comments in a sermon:

It is said of Ishmael and his descendants in ancient times that they would live by the sword and he was a wild donkey of a man. His hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand will be against him. And he will live in hostility toward all his brothers. I suggest that this is the spirit that has come to fill Islam or perhaps that Islam encompassed from the very beginning.<sup>38</sup>

Grant Jeffrey boldly opines, “No one questions that the conflict between Jews and Arabs has ancient origins.”<sup>39</sup> One of the most influential evangelical pastors in America today, John MacArthur, states in his book on Islam, in which was written in response to the 9/11-01 attacks, “untold number of terrorists, claiming descent from Ishmael, have declared war against the rest of the world.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> John Hagee, *Attack on America: New York, Jerusalem, and the role of terrorism in the last days* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 2001), 64-65, quoted in Kidd, *American Christians and Islam*, 154.

<sup>38</sup> This sermon can be viewed at <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/Story?id=4905624&page=1>.

<sup>39</sup> Jeffrey, *The Next World War*, 44.

<sup>40</sup> John MacArthur, *Terrorism, Jihad, and the Bible: a response to the terrorist attacks* (Nashville: W Pub. Group, 2001), 29, 42-43, 59, 62; James L. Garlow, *A Christian's Response to Islam*, New. (David C. Cook, 2005), 19-30; Hal Lindsey, *The Everlasting Hatred: The Roots of Jihad* (Oracle House Publishing, 2002), 14.

However, there are a few evangelicals in the post 9/11 context who, although they regard Islam as a cosmic rival of Christianity, they argue that there is no plausible connection between Ishmael and the Arabs and Islam. Most surprisingly, among these few, are the Caner brothers and evangelical author Randall Price. They have argued that Ishmael never settled near Mecca and therefore is not the primogenitor of Islam.<sup>41</sup>

The exact impact of the Ishmael connection on the evangelical conscience has not been studied scientifically, but we may make a few observations. First, the Ishmael connection builds a simple cognitive bridge for the evangelical mind between the complexities of the Muslim world and Biblical prophecy. In other words, this connection builds on what Christians are supposed to know well (Biblical stories) and then uses that knowledge to explain difficult realities of the Muslim world. Second, dispensationalists especially favor making this connection as it provides another reason to defend Israel (Isaac) from his wild man, half brother (Ishmael). Third, the Ishmael connection extends to the tension between Christianity and Islam to the ancient foundations of monotheism, and thus provides Christianity with the ultimate mandate to defend itself against Islam. The fourth observation is somewhat counterintuitive: if employed carefully and strategically, the Ishmael connection may actually help build sympathy among evangelicals towards the Muslim world as it established a relational connection between Christians and Muslims. Anne Cooper and Elsie A. Maxwell are an example. They

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<sup>41</sup> Emir Caner and Ergun Caner, *More than a prophet: an insider's response to Muslim beliefs about Jesus and Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2003), 97; Randall Price, *Unholy War: America, Israel and Radical Islam* (Harvest House Publishers, 2001), 148-150.

leveraged the half-brother kinship between the Biblical characters Isaac and Ishmael in their irenic book *Ishmael, My Brother: A Christian Introduction to Islam*.

### **Zero-Sum Game**

In the October 1911 edition of the famed Protestant journal on the Muslim World, namely, *The Muslim World*, the Reverend W.G. Peel, Bishop of Mombasa, argues that it behooves each Christian man and woman in this twentieth century to do something definite “to stem the tide of Moslem invasion,” for the adoption of the faith of Islam by the pagan people is in no sense whatever a stepping-stone towards, or a preparation for, Christianity, but exactly the reverse. He argues that Christianity and Islam do not just lead to different destinations; rather, they are paths directly opposing each other. If one converts from paganism to Islam, their souls do not remain equally neutral; instead, their souls move one step farther into darkness.<sup>42</sup> Peel’s argument is as fitting within the evangelical discourse today as it was in 1911.

In other words, Islam and Christianity are in a zero-sum game for the souls of man. Where one advances, the other recedes. Christianity, therefore, is the sole hope for the destruction of Islam and Islam is the sole hope, for Muslims, for the destruction of Christianity. In the words of William Wagner, a missionary strategist and author, “Christianity remains the number one buffer against Islam, a fact readily recognized by those who seek a worldwide *ummah*.”<sup>43</sup> Or in the words of Jim Tonkovich, as they

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<sup>42</sup> W.G. Peel, “Islam Not a Stepping-Stone Towards Christianity,” *The Muslim World* 1 (October 1911), [http://www.unashamedofthegospel.org/islam\\_not\\_stepping\\_stone.cfm](http://www.unashamedofthegospel.org/islam_not_stepping_stone.cfm).

<sup>43</sup> Wagner, *How Islam plans to change the world*, 209.

appeared in the influential evangelical magazine *Christianity Today*, “We must develop a Christian worldview in order to survive.” Survive, that is, the “challenge of Islam.”<sup>44</sup>

### **Clash of Civilizations**

A number of evangelicals in the post 9/11 context extend the cosmic rivalry between Islam and Christianity to Islam and America and/or the West. This extension is prevalent among evangelical public officials. Chuck Colson, one of the most influential evangelicals in the public square, notes this very rivalry as part of his motivation for writing his book *The Faith*, “The Christian West is under assault by the twin challenges of secularism and radical Islam. Only through Christianity, I believe, can Western Europe and America meet these desperate challenges.”<sup>45</sup> Close after 9/11, Colson declared that Samuel Huntington was the “most accurate prophet of the ‘90s” and that, “Great clashes of worldview – that is, how people understand ultimate reality – continue to divide the world, and will do so until the true end of history when the Lord returns.”<sup>46</sup> Gary Bauer, an evangelical politician and once-candidate for the Republican party nomination to President, could not be more clear:

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<sup>44</sup> Jim Tonkonwich, “Speaking Out: Ten Things We Should Have Learned Since September 11, 2001,” *Christianity Today*, September 1, 2002, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/septemberweb-only/9-9-21.0.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Katherine T. Phan, “Chuck Colson: Muslims are ‘Better Theologians’ than American Christians,” *Christian Post*, Feb. 16, 2008, Available online at <http://www.christianpost.com/Education/Theology/2008/02/chuck-colson-muslims-are-better-theologians-than-american-christians-16/index.html>.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Colson, “The Back Page: Drawing the Battle Lines,” *Christianity Today*, January 7, 2002, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/january7/42.80.html>.



Western civilization again faces a defining moment in the struggle to defend itself against an enemy that seeks its demise. Sadly, however, many in the West today, including many Christians, fail to understand what's at stake: the continuation of our way of life and even our very lives. This is not merely an 'election' between two political parties with a common interest in the peace and prosperity of the world. This is an existential conflict in which one side says, 'convert or die.'<sup>47</sup>

This extension is also prevalent among evangelical church leaders. Rod Parsley is a Pentecostal megachurch pastor in Columbus, Ohio. His church boasts 12,000 members and he has an impressive global televangelism ministry. After endorsing John McCain as a presidential candidate in the Spring of 2008, *Mother Jones Magazine* released an article detailing Parsley's previous comments on Islam.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps more than any other, Parsley combines the Christian-Islam cosmic rivalry with America-West relations:

We are heading toward a historic conflict. Islam is growing rapidly and is becoming more violent. America has historically understood herself to be a bastion against Islam in the world. Now America is engaged in conflict with Muslims as home and in the far-flung battlegrounds of Afghanistan and Iraq.

History is crashing in upon us. *What makes the conflict with Islam so desperate, is*

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<sup>47</sup> Gary Bauer, "Can Christians and Muslims Reconcile?," *Human Events*, February 4, 2008, <http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=24776&page=1#c1>.

<sup>48</sup> Thereafter, McCain renounced Parsley's endorsement. But the damage on the image of evangelical Christians towards the Muslim world was already done. David Corn, "McCain's Spiritual Guide: Destroy Islam," *Mother Jones*, March 12, 2008, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2008/03/mccains-spiritual-guide-destroy-islam>.

*that Islam is not just another belief system at odds with Christianity...Islam is not just another belief system which is at conflict with America, with Christianity. It's not just a set of superstitions or practices that people do in the privacy of their own homes that never bother anyone else. Islam is, instead, a faith that fully intends to conquer the world. ... Islam is an anti-Christ religion that intends through violence to conquer the world.*<sup>49</sup>

I cannot tell you how important it is that we understand the true nature of Islam, that we see it for what it really is. In fact, I will tell you this: I do not believe our country can truly fulfill its divine purpose until we understand our historical conflict with Islam. I know that this statement sounds extreme, but I do not shrink from its implications. *The fact is that America was founded, in part, with the intention of seeing this false religion destroyed, and I believe September 11, 2001, was a generational call to arms that we can no longer ignore.*<sup>50</sup>

Islam, in other words, is “not just another belief system” that exists and that is at odds with Christianity. It is, in fact, a cosmic opponent to Christianity and to America because of its ambitions for global domination and because America was founded, in part, to counter these kinds of forces in the world.

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<sup>49</sup> Brian Ross, Avni Patel, and Rehab El-Buri, “McCain Pastor: Islam Is a 'Conspiracy of Spiritual Evil',” *ABC News*, May 22, 2008, <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/Story?id=4905624&page=1>.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Corn, “McCain's Spiritual Guide.”

Parsley's comments are not too far off those of other evangelical influencers on Islam. In his most recent book, *The Everlasting Hatred of the Roots of Jihad* (2002), Hal Lindsey declares, "Islam represents the single greatest threat to the continued survival of the planet the world has ever seen."<sup>51</sup>

Sociology professor Alvin Schmidt, in his book *The Great Divide*, attempts to establish the clash between Islam and the West as well as the superiority of the Christian West over Islamic civilization. He provides comparative analysis of issues such as the ethos of Jesus and Muhammad, religious history, the treatment of women, slavery, charity, liberty and justice, science and learning, and the religion-state relationship. Schmidt defends the actions of the Christian Crusaders as well as argues for the historical supremacy of Western/Christian science over Islamic science. As sensational as these claims may or may not be, Schmidt's book was endorsed by a number of popular evangelical leaders, namely, Marvin Olasky (editor-in-chief of the evangelical *World Magazine* and provost of The King's College in Manhattan), Anis Shorish, Robert Spencer, Tom White (executive director of Voice of the Martyrs), and Ergun Caner.

Some evangelical writers explicitly use Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis to argue that Islam and the West are pitted against each other. In his book, *Why the Rest Hates the West: Understanding the Roots of Global Rage* (2004), Church historian Meic Pearse rearticulates Huntington's thesis and argues that the reason why others,

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<sup>51</sup> Lindsey, *The Everlasting Hatred*, 11. Lindsey is one of the most influential evangelicals in the latter twentieth century on the topic Christian eschatology was dispensationalist author Hal Lindsey. His book, co-authored by Carole C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) became a bestseller. According to the book's product description, *The New York Times* called it the "no. 1 non-fiction bestseller of the decade." Lindsey's influence among evangelicals took significantly waned due to controversy and failed predictions. Nevertheless, Lindsey continues to write and garner influence among his evangelical audience.

particularly Muslims, despise the West is due to cultural differences, not necessarily policy or Islam itself.<sup>52</sup> Mark Hitchcock argues that situations such as the Muslim riots in France and the Danish cartoon controversy, both in 2005, reveal Islam's contrast with Christianity: "The clash of civilizations is worldviews. A clash of values. And ultimately a clash between Muhammad and Christ."<sup>53</sup> Mark Gabriel has also argued that Islam and Christianity cannot coexist: "The bottom line of this book is that the war today is between seventh-century Islamic culture and twenty-first-century modern culture. These cultures are incompatible. They cannot coexist because the values of one violate the values of the other."<sup>54</sup>

Lamin Sanneh, one of the foremost academic experts on Islam, who is also an evangelical Roman Catholic, accepts the clash of civilizations thesis, "As a statement of fact the point is incontestable." The challenge now is to decide how to respond. He argues that the Christian church should promote a "dialogue of civilizations as an alternative," although he is not optimistic about whether the church will actually do just that.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> It is important to note that this thesis is not accepted among all. In fact, the World Economic Forum's group of experts on Islam/West relations concluded just the opposite; namely, that the Muslim world's primary disgruntlement with the West was not due to culture, but rather to Western policies. Community of west and Islam Dialogue (C-100), "Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue" (World Economic Forum, January 2008), [www.weforum.org/pdf/C100/Islam\\_West.pdf](http://www.weforum.org/pdf/C100/Islam_West.pdf).

<sup>53</sup> Mark Hitchcock, *Iran: the coming crisis* (Sisters Or.: Multnomah Publishers, 2006), 153.

<sup>54</sup> Mark Gabriel, *Culture clash*, 1st ed. (Lake Mary Fla.: Frontline, 2007), 156.

<sup>55</sup> "I am uncertain as to whether the West is prepared to do that if it requires acceptance and commitment to the West's own core values as the basis of encounter. There is too strong a secular antipathy to Christianity for the West to mobilize as a coherent society. Notice the strength of the culture wars in the churches themselves." Jonathan J. Bonk, "The Defender of the Good News: Questioning Lamin Sanneh," *Christianity Today*, October 2003, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/october/35.112.html>.

## Conclusion

A challenge is something new, something that can be sought after and with much work, achieved. A minority of evangelicals thinks of Islam as a challenge in this way.<sup>56</sup> This manner of thinking about Islam is more practical than thinking of Islam as an existential challenger. For these evangelicals, what matters is how Christians and the church can learn to interact with Muslims and the Muslim world for the goal of the spread of Christianity and the true worship of God, rather than the cosmological battle waging between Islam and Christianity.

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<sup>56</sup> One of these evangelical leaders is Colin Chapman. Chapman has been an unending advocate for Christian rapprochement with Islam and Muslims. In his modern classic on Islam, *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam*, 2nd ed. (IVP Books, 2008), Chapman emphasizes honorable relationships with Muslims. As ominous as the title may sound, the book is actually relatively calm in its treatment of Islam. While Chapman speaks to the “challenge” of Islam, he means that Islam presents new challenges (note the use of plural) and questions that the Christian world must deal with. Chapman’s book intentionally and almost forcefully brings the relationship between Islam and Christianity down to the human level by emphasizing interpersonal relationships between Christians and Muslims as well as the details of Islamic orthodoxy.

## **CHAPTER 5: OTHER THEMES**

As explained in chapter 4, the presiding theme within evangelical thought on Islam is that Islam is a cosmic challenger to Christianity. There are other themes, though, within evangelical discourse that merit attention. This chapter surveys these other themes. These themes are not analyzed individually, but as a part of a broader discourse. Outside of the challenger thesis, the most predominant theme has to do with the very theological foundations of religion, namely, the issue of the nature of God. All types of evangelical literature on Islam address the question whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God. Secondly, evangelicals are very concerned about what it means to be a “good Muslim.” “Islam”, like Christianity, is an abstraction that is reinterpreted globally in innumerable ways. This leads to ambiguity within evangelicalism what they are “dealing with.” Is Islam a peaceful religion? What does it mean to be a true Muslim? What does the Qur’an say? Why would someone want to convert to Islam? These questions make up the second set of themes that are surveyed below. This chapter ends with a case study of one particular set of initiatives that illustrate common themes within evangelical thought on Islam. The documents “A Common Word” and “Loving God and Neighbor” stimulated unprecedented evangelical discussion on Islam. Though the documents were new, the discussion rehashed age-old issues regarding Christian engagement with Muslims.

### **Allah Vs. God**

There is one debate among evangelical Christians regarding Islam that is not as present in their conversations about other major world religions: namely, do Muslims and Christians

worship the same God? Another way to task this question was made popular by Timothy George in his book of the same title, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?* Evangelicals since 9/11 have answered this question in three different ways: yes, no, and maybe. This section does not expound on the theology that forms the evangelical and Muslim conceptions of “God”; rather, the interest here is how evangelicals answer this question. For the purpose of simplicity, this section refers to the Christian God as “God” and the Islamic God as “Allah.” The aim is not to imply that a Christian cannot use the term “Allah” or a Muslim cannot use the term “God”; for, strictly speaking, that itself is just a matter of translation. The Arabic word Allah means most literally “the God” – and in reverse, the English word God is best translated into Arabic as “Allah.” But given the practical and theological complexity of referring to the “Islamic God” and the “evangelical Christian God”, this section succumbs to simplicity in diction.

## *No*

79% of evangelicals in America believe that Muslims and Christians do not pray to the same God.<sup>1</sup> The most common reason for this majority response is that the Islamic Allah and the Christian God mean different things even though they are “tagged” with the same name. An illustration commonly used goes something like this: two people can have the same name, but that does not make them the same person. Therefore, it is the character of the person that defines the essence of that person. In this way, many evangelicals argue that since Allah and God have different characters and even attributes then they are two different deities, one false and one true.

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<sup>1</sup> “Evangelical Views of Islam,” *Beliefnet*, <http://www.beliefnet.com/News/Politics/2003/04/Evangelical-Views-Of-Islam.aspx>.

Typically, making the distinction between Allah and God provides a nice pathway for polemical critique of the concept of “Allah.” For instance, after making the clarification that Allah is not the same God, Anees and Coleman describe how Allah is impersonal, impersonal, avenging, and he has “radical unity.”<sup>2</sup> Separating “Allah” from God makes Allah a constitutive Other that can be dissected and critiqued.

The Caner brothers argue against the Arab Christian tradition of using Allah to describe the Christian God. They subtly argue that the Persian term *khudu* should be used for God in Arabic and not Allah, because when one a Christian “Allah”, Muslim listeners will not understand the term in the same way as the Christian. A number of others have criticized using the word “Allah” to describe the Christian God. Jim Murk states, “It is unfortunate and confusing that the Arabic translations of the Bible, and Bible translations in other Muslim countries, use the name Allah for God. The proper translation would be to use the word *Ilah* as it is also used in the Qur’an to refer to God in the generic sense.”<sup>3</sup> While agreeing that Allah technically means God in Arabic, many still use it as a symbolic reference to the Islamic God. As an example, Mark Gabriel uses Allah only when speaking about the God of Islam even though, as an Arab, he knows the commonplace usage of Allah among Christians and in the Arabic language. Colin Chapman, evangelical scholar of Islam and long time missionary to the Muslim world, clearly believes that the deities of Islam and Christianity are not the same, but Allah is an appropriate word for God.<sup>4</sup> This unique designation of Allah only referring to the Islamic God gives Allah a kind of symbolic, even mystical connotation, thus contributing to the commonplace misnomer among Christians regarding the word Allah.

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<sup>2</sup> Anees Zaka and Diane Coleman, *The Truth About Islam: The Noble Qur’an’s Teachings in Light of the Holy Bible* (P & R Publishing, 2004), 97ff.

<sup>3</sup> Jim Murk, *Islam Rising: The Never Ending Jihad Against Christians* (21st Century Press, 2005), 103.

<sup>4</sup> Colin Gilbert Chapman, *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam*, 2nd ed. (IVP Books, 2008), 276-279.



*Yes*

The most common argument for those that believe that Muslims and Christians worship the same God is that Muslims are similar to Jews: they worship one God, or YHWH, but their conception of Him is just incomplete. Mateen Ellass is an evangelical who employs this argument: “For all these reasons, I believe on the basis of two biblical passages [1 Jn. 4:1-26 and Romans 10:1-3] that Muslims fall into the category of those worshipping the true God in ignorance rather than those pursuing a false god.”<sup>5</sup> Mathias Zahniser, who taught in the E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary from 1983-2000 also falls in this camp. Incidentally, while no serious scholar would consider Pope John Paul II “evangelical” in the sense used in this paper, he also falls into this camp.<sup>6</sup>

*Maybe*

The most nuanced and extended treatment of this question by an evangelical in the post 9/11 era is the work Timothy George on Islam: *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?* This book was published after an article by the same title appeared in the widely read evangelical magazine *Christianity Today*.<sup>7</sup> In this article and book George answers his book title’s question with the answer of “yes and no.” Yes, God is the same as Allah in the sense that he is the only God that is. There is only one God according to both religions, no matter what you call them they exist. They are a reality. But Christians and Muslim do not have the same God most principally

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<sup>5</sup> Mateen Ellass, *Understanding the Koran: A Quick Christian Guide to the Muslim Holy Book* (Zondervan, 2004), 91-92.

<sup>6</sup> Pope John Paul, “Muslims and Christians Adore the One God,” May 5, 1999, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/jp2muslm.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Timothy George, “Is the God of Muhammad the Father of Jesus?” *Christianity Today*, February 4, 2002, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/february4/1.28.html>.

because Allah is not triune.<sup>8</sup> George cites Kenneth Cragg's argument that Muslims and Christians speak of the same subject when they speak of God, but they use different predicates.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, both George and Ellass use the same argument about nature verses the predicates used to describe God. Their arguments though are reverse mirrors of each other. Ellass argues that predicates might differ but the nature of a being remains the same no matter how it is described. In this sense, Ellass's argument corresponds to George's "yes" response: God and Allah are the same in that there really is only one God who remains the same no matter what people think. George argues that ontological predicates actually change the perception of a deity, and therefore the deity is different.

### **How Evangelicals Interpret the Qur'an**

When evangelical Christians begin to learn about Islam they are most often interested in following the same pattern that they recommend for others interested in Christianity – read the Bible.<sup>10</sup> Muslims in the West have nurtured this desire among Christians by publishing Western friendly editions of the Qur'an and stocking popular bookshelves and websites with the Qur'an, often for a cheap price and sometimes for free. Furthermore, it is not insignificant that Christians most often apply the rules of Biblical hermeneutics to their reading of the Qur'an. While the rules of textual hermeneutics share many similarities between orthodox Islam and orthodox Christianity, this application of the Biblical rules to the Qur'an causes problems. These problems are immediate and deeply disturbing for evangelicals.

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<sup>8</sup> Timothy George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?* (Zondervan, 2002), 69-70.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>10</sup> References to the *hadith* in evangelical literature are rare, probably due to the volume, controversial histories, and, often, peculiarity of the different *hadiths*.

The concept of abrogation within the Qur'an is a simple example. Abrogation (Arabic root: *naskh*) is a "hermeneutical tool in Muslim jurisprudence in dealing with apparent inconsistencies within and between the Qur'an and the *sunna*."<sup>11</sup> There are several ways to apply abrogation within Islamic jurisprudence, but the way in which gets the most attention is, obviously, when one Qur'anic verse annuls another verse previously revealed. One of the most famous examples of abrogation in the Qur'an concerns the legality of drinking wine. The *Encyclopedia of Islam*'s entry on abrogation nicely lays out the abrogation sequence: first, S. 16:67 acknowledges wine as a "goodly provision", then in S. 2:219 wine is a great sin but also a benefit, then S. 4:43 commands the Muslim not to go to prayer in a drunken state, and then S. 5:91–2 and S. 9:5 finally prohibit consumption. The *Encyclopedia of Islam* notes that a total of 124 verses are sometimes listed as having been abrogated by the one verse (S. 9:5).

The Qur'anic hermeneutical concept of abrogation clashes with the Protestant Christian hermeneutical rule of the inerrancy and unity of the Bible. It is not hard to see how Christians might have trouble with abrogation given that most Christians apply Biblical hermeneutical rules, consciously or subconsciously, to the Qur'an. To admit that Revelation corrects itself is tantamount to apostasy in evangelical Christianity. Evangelical Christians often use the case of abrogation to make a direct, polemical attack against Islam.

Similar to what happens with abrogation, evangelical Christians process their reading of Qur'anic verses that are violent in nature through their own cognitive frames. Thus, surprisingly, evangelicals display an incredible obstinacy in accepting peaceful Islamic interpretations of the violent verses in the Qur'an. In fact, this pattern of reading the texts, but abstaining from any

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<sup>11</sup> The two main Qur'an verses that support abrogation are: "God will cancel (*yansakhu*) anything that Satan throws in" (22:52) and "None of Our revelations do We abrogate (*nansakh*) or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar" (2:106). Andrew Rippin, "Abrogation," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, ed. Gudrun Krämer et al., 3rd ed. (Brill Online: Brill, 2009), [http://www.brillonline.nl.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/subscriber/entry?entry=ei3\\_COM-0104](http://www.brillonline.nl.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/subscriber/entry?entry=ei3_COM-0104).

consideration of Islamic interpretations is common. There seems to be less interest in the actual discourse regarding the thought, behavior, and ideology of actual Muslims, than the words of the Qur'anic text.

### **Defining “True Islam”**

Evangelicals are concerned with interpreting the Qur'an because they are concerned with the “real” meaning of “Islam” and “Muslim.” Since there are no major organizing bodies that organize and shape Muslims globally, the only unifying thread between them is merely the abstraction of “Islam.” This leads to a very practical problem for those interested in learning about Islam. There are no global, central spaces for learning about the common denominators of what it means to be “Muslim.” In fact, there is no lack of vehement discussion among Muslims throughout Islamic history of what it means to be a true “Muslim.” This identity question has been all the more escalated since the arrival of modernism and then postmodernism. It is not too surprising, therefore, that non-muslims have taken up the task themselves to try to identify what it means to be a “good Muslim.”

Most predominantly, evangelicals believe that “true Islam” is either peaceful and moderate or violent and extremist. Those who put forward the former argument hold up moderate Muslims as the paragon example of what it means to be a Muslim. If evangelical authors embrace the latter argument, they end up religiously validating Islamic extremism while creating an enormous dilemma for the moderate Muslim.

### *True Islam is Peaceful and Moderate*

62% of evangelicals in America believe that terrorists have ‘hijacked’ Islam.<sup>12</sup>

Propagating the idea that true Islam is peaceful and moderate is most often the business of the public sector. President George W. Bush is a classic example. Days after Sept. 11, 2001, the President visited an Islamic Center in Washington D.C. and stated, “The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That’s not what Islam is all about.” In a statement like this, the President tries to define for the American public the nature of “true Islam.” President Bush has also argued that “true Islam” is a peaceful Islam: “The terrorists practice a fringe form of Islamic extremism that has been rejected by Muslim scholars and the vast majority of Muslim clerics—a fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam.”<sup>13</sup> In a speech before Congress on September 20, 2001, Bush spoke directly to Muslims: “We respect your faith... Its teaching are good and peaceful, and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah. The terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect, to hijack Islam itself.”<sup>14</sup> The cynic would decry this as manipulating religious discourse for political ends -- to bring more of the moderate Islamic community under the former President’s agenda. Karen Hughes, who served under Bush as the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, and also an evangelical Christian, often spoke of true Islam and a perverted Islam: “Most Americans recognize that terrorists do not represent—but instead pervert—all faiths with their barbaric acts.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> “Evangelical Views of Islam.”

<sup>13</sup> Ted Olsen, “How Peaceful Is Islam?,” *Christianity Today*, September 1, 2001, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/septemberweb-only/9-17-52.0.html>.

<sup>14</sup> George Bush, Transcript, September 21, 2001, <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>.

<sup>15</sup> Karen Hughes, “Encouraging Interfaith Dialogues,” December 4, 2007, <http://acommonword.com/index.php?page=media&item=221>.

Rick Santorum, the former Senator from Pennsylvania, once argued that Islamofascism is a “perversion of Islam”, implying the existence of a true, uncorrupted version of Islam.<sup>16</sup>

Knowing the “truth” about Islam provides a cognitive box in which to place Islam. This is why there are several Christian books on Islam that market themselves as bringing the “truth” about Islam: John Ankerberg and Emir Caner wrote a series of books called “The Truth about Islam Series”, John Leo wrote *Islam, the Truth Revealed: A Clear Look at the Muslim Religion*, Anees and Coleman wrote *The Truth About Islam*, Robert Spencer wrote *The Truth About Muhammad*. Evangelicals are on the whole pragmatists; confusion over the very nature of Islam deeply disturbs the pragmatic spirit, as it is difficult with any ambiguity to make strategic decisions about how to react to Islam.

#### *True Islam is Violent and Extremist*

70% of evangelicals believe that Islam is a religion of violence.<sup>17</sup> Most often, evangelical authors in this camp refer to the Qur’an’s violent passages, irrespective of their context and without any deference to Qur’anic exegetical rules. Grant Jeffrey argues, “The current manifestations of holy war are not an aberration of modern Islam that arose over the last few decades... The holy-war mandate remains a core doctrine of Islam.”<sup>18</sup> “True Islam is militant,” opines Reza Safa, “an era of warfare with the radical Islam, or the truth Islam, has begun.”<sup>19</sup> Ellis Skolfield states, “Islam has two faces, the benign face it prefers to show to the West and the militant face it openly displays in the Middle East. One face is true Islam, the other is a

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<sup>16</sup> Tony Carnes, “On the Record: Rick Santorum,” *Christianity Today*, October 30, 2006, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/octoberweb-only/144-12.0.html>.

<sup>17</sup> “Evangelical Views of Islam.”

<sup>18</sup> Grant Jeffrey, *The next world war: what prophecy reveals about extreme Islam and the West*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs Colo.: Waterbrook Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>19</sup> Reza F. Safa, *Inside Islam: Exposing and Reaching the World of Islam* (Creation House, 1997), 42; Reza Safa, *The Coming Fall of Islam in Iran: Thousands of Muslims Find Christ in the Midst of Persecution* (Frontline, 2006), 1, 39.

charade.”<sup>20</sup> Mark Gabriel often speaks of “true Islam” and the “true Muslim” – “The true Muslim believes that the whole world is his home... a sincere believer in Islam will not die for a patch of dirt...”<sup>21</sup> Ralph Stice argues that the Iranian revolutionary leader, the Ayatollah Khomeini, was the “George Washington of modern, pure Islam.”<sup>22</sup> Randall Price argues that the essential difference between Islam and Christianity is that acts of terror are acts of obedience in Islam, whereas they are acts of disobedience in Christianity. “Therefore, every war waged in the name of Christianity must be viewed by true followers of Christ as *unholy*, whereas every *jihad* waged in the name of Allah must be viewed by true followers of Islam as *holy*”<sup>23</sup> As a last example, John Hagee argues that good Muslims will follow the command of the Qur’an on violence: “Islam not only condones violence, it commands it.”

To enhance their argument that “true Islam” is violent and extreme, those quoted above often argue unashamedly that the War on Terror is not just a political war, but also, more accurately, a religious war. Also, the Palestine-Israel conflict is primarily a religious conflict going back thousands of years.<sup>24</sup> This argument obviously has significant policy implications. Defining the enemy in a war affects everything -- in this case, whether the enemy in the War on Terror is extremism or the religion of Islam. For instance, if the enemy is Islam, this leads to greater desire to monitor pietistic Muslims, the more religious societies in the Muslim world, and places of religious devotion and religious teaching.

Defining “true Islam” can backlash on evangelicals. For example, Craig Winn sets up a class of good and bad Muslims: “The simple truth is: good Muslims are bad people. Islam makes

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<sup>20</sup> Ellis Skolfield, *Islam in the End Times*, 1st ed. (Fish House Publishing, 2007), 8710.

<sup>21</sup> Mark A. Gabriel, *Islam and Terrorism: What the Quran Really Teaches About Christianity, Violence and the Goals of the Islamic Jihad* (Creation House, 2002), 48.

<sup>22</sup> Ralph W. Stice, *From 9/11 To 666: The Convergence of Current Events, Biblical Prophecy, and the Vision of Islam* (ACW Press, 2005), 34.

<sup>23</sup> Randall Price, *Unholy War: America, Israel and Radical Islam* (Harvest House Publishers, 2001), 21, 27

<sup>24</sup> For instance, see Price, *Unholy War*.

them that way. While there are plenty of ‘bad’ Muslims who are good people, they are as impotent as bad Nazis in the Third Reich or bad Communists during Stalin’s era.”<sup>25</sup> Evangelicals who use this kind of “good Muslim”/ “bad Muslim” dichotomy find themselves – though most do not recognize it – in a conundrum. That is, they argue that to be a true Muslim one must commit acts of terror. Therefore, these authors must push for either the reform of Islam, which is no small deed, or they must call people out of Islam completely, which is the evangelical dream. The conundrum lies in the fact that they actually validate extreme literalist interpretations of the Qur’an that are most often used by violent Islamists when they argue that “true Islam” is violent. This is what Anglican Bishop and expert on Islam Bill Musk calls the “certainty trap”: in their “insistent appeal to the Qur’an and Hadith” extremist Muslims put forward a “powerful exegesis” that challenges the views of moderate Muslims and calls them to a more radical faith.<sup>26</sup> In response to the Islamists, the moderate Muslim faces a “trap” of either accepting the legitimacy of their holy texts and traditions and becoming an extremist Muslim themselves, or adopting a hermeneutic of suspicion and remaining moderate. Thus, Musk calls Muslims to live “somewhere between a hermeneutic of certainty and a hermeneutic of suspicion... in a world where dogma... and doubt coexist as part of the framework of faith.” In other words, Musk aims to reform the very idea of what it means to be a Muslim.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Craig Winn, *Prophet of Doom: Islam's Terrorist Dogma in Muhammad's Own Words* (CricketSong Books, 2004), v.

<sup>26</sup> Bill Musk, *The certainty trap : can Christians and Muslims afford the luxury of fundamentalism?* (Pasadena Calif.: W. Carey Library Publishers, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> This paragraph is adapted from Joey Shaw, “The Certainty Trap or the Arrogance Trap; A Response to Bill Musk,” *St. Francis Magazine* 5, no. 1 (February 2009): 1; Musk, *The certainty trap* : xxviii. In my article I extensively critique Musk’s book.



## **Is Islam a Religion of Peace?**

This issue of “true Islam” is related to the question, “Is Islam a religion of peace?” Four kinds of events within international relations keep this question alive within evangelical discourse on Islam: 9/11 and the War on Terror, regular acts of terror by Muslims, the Palestine-Israel conflict, and the relative inability of the Muslim world to produce viable democracies.

It is important to note that in the evangelical mind there are several layers of questions involved in this one simple question, “Is Islam a religion of peace?” One question is, “Does Islam prescribe violent action?” A different question is, “Do Muslims have a propensity towards violence because they are Muslims?” The most practical question involved is, “Should I expect violent action from friend, coworker, or neighbor because he or she is a Muslim?” One of the most perplexing questions for evangelicals is, “If it is a religion of peace, then why are there violent Muslims who try to justify their actions by their religion and their holy book, the Qur’an?” For those who do view Islam as inherently violent, the follow up question is often, “Does that mean that to be a pious and true Muslim one must be violent?” Finally, evangelicals ask, “Is there any way to reform the theology and practice of Islam so that terrorism is abhorred by pious Muslims.”

Why is this question important? There are, obviously, very real and drastic implications of how one deals with the question of Islam and violence. For instance, policy may be crafted and implemented differently depending on whether there are inherent propensities in Muslims and the Muslim world toward violent action. This question may also give leverage to polemical and apologetic advances against Islam. One of the more interesting assumptions at play in this question is that true religion must be inherently peaceful.

According to a 2003 Beliefnet poll, a strong majority of evangelicals in America (70%) believe that Islam is religions of violence. 76% of evangelicals believe that Islam opposes religious freedom, 72% believe that Islam opposes pluralism/democracy, and 72% believe that Islamic law violates human rights.<sup>28</sup> The overwhelming sentiment within post 9/11 evangelical literature is that Islam is not a religion of peace, but Muslims may or may not be themselves violent.

### *Why Do People Convert to Islam?*

How evangelicals process others' conversion to Islam depends on how they answer the questions above. An evangelical's view of the particular rationality of Islam – whether it is peaceful or not, the meaning of true Islam, and how to interpret the Qur'an – influences how this evangelical reacts to someone converting to Islam. Conversion may be reasonable or unreasonable.

Conversion to Islam seems to baffle them. Theologically, Islam presents a diametrical and direct confrontation with evangelical Christianity. Orthodox Islam directly denies the Lordship of Jesus, the significance of the cross and resurrection of Christ, and the veracity of the contemporary Bible. The issue of conversion to Islam demands evangelical explanation. A number of evangelicals feel compelled, therefore, to offer plausible explanations of why Islam is growing not only in the global East, but also, and more importantly to American Christians, in the global West. There is a sense that if they can explain away conversion to Islam in the West

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<sup>28</sup> "Evangelical Views of Islam"; Another poll from 2005 showed lower numbers: 49% of evangelicals agreed that "Islam is more likely to encourage violence." "Views of Muslim-Americans Hold Steady After London Bombings," *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*, July 26, 2005, <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=89>. A 2007 Pew poll showed that 56% of evangelicals say that Islam encourages violence. "Public Expresses Mixed Views of Islam, Mormonism," *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*, September 25, 2007, 1, <http://pewforum.org/surveys/religionviews07/> Interestingly, there seems to be an positive correlation between personal religiosity and the perception that Islam is a violent religion. "Go Figure," *Christianity Today*, February 2005, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/february/20.24.html>.

then Islam will be less frightening to the church. After all, only that which is understood by evangelicals can be countered with a targeted strategy.

On the whole, evangelicals are obsessed with conversion – conversion to Christianity and conversion to Islam. This is not surprising given their distinct emphasis on the experience of being “born again” and the eternal significance of one’s spiritual decisions during this life. Each conversion to Christianity marks the spiritual triumph of their faith and another soul saved from eternity in hell.

The following is a sample of explanations offered by evangelicals on why people convert to Islam. Pawson believes that Islam has appeal because it is a recent, simple, easy, reverent, moral, and a male religion. Additionally, the rise of Islam is due to the spiritual vacuum left in Britain. This spiritual vacuum is a result of the subtle ascendancy of the following: rationalism, romanticism, relativism, pluralism, syncretism, and secularism, materialism, hedonism, and consumerism.<sup>29</sup> These “isms” have provided, according to Pawson a significant ‘opportunity’ for Islam in places like Britain.

Mateen Ellass explains that Islam has grown because of immigration, birth rates and conversion. Like Pawson, he cites a spiritual vacuum pervading American culture and that the preaching of the church seems tired and trite to many Americans. Also, Islam’s direct call for radical obedience of its followers appeals to American’s tired of complacent cultural Christianity. Islam has clear moral regulations for this life. Lastly, Pawson notes that Muslims have had a renewal of missionary zeal.<sup>30</sup>

Ron Rhodes’s list is somewhat more practical than the others: financial support, it is a universal religion, a simple religion, a comprehensive religion, an easier-to-obey religion, a

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<sup>29</sup> David Pawson, *The challenge of Islam to Christians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003), 23-55.

<sup>30</sup> Ellass, *Understanding the Koran*, 158-160.

rationalistic religion,<sup>31</sup> a brotherhood religion, and the fact that Muslims commonly proselytizing. Reza Safa's explanation for the growth of Islam is unoriginal, but simple and verifiable: immigration, birth rates, and the mass conversion of African Americans to Islam. Ergun and Emir Caner try to explain why women convert to Islam: it is a religion of the heart, a religion of experience, and a religion of the family. McDowell and Zaka offer reasons why African Americans convert. These reasons focus mostly on the failure of the African American church.<sup>32</sup>

As noted above, clarifying why people convert to Islam opens the door to evangelical counter attack. Poston and Ellis's work demonstrated this very dynamic. Poston interviewed over 100 Americans who have converted to Islam. From these interviews he has found 5 major reasons why Anglo-Americans convert to Islam: simplicity, rationality, this-worldliness, equality, and individualism. Then Poston and Ellis give advice for Christians on how to counter these issues: do not impose strictly human ideas of rationality upon Christianity; when discipling others in the faith, teach about all of life, not just the 'spiritual'; emphasize that the Christian scriptures celebrate diversity and prohibit prejudice of all kinds; and show that Christianity is the *ultimate* do-it-yourself system of faith and practice (any individual can approach God without priestly aid). With Poston and Ellis's counter attack strategy, evangelicalism seems almost irresistible. "Make no mistake," argue Poston and Ellis, "When individuals apprehend

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<sup>31</sup> He means by this that in comparison to Christianity, Islamic doctrine is devoid of theological conundrums or mystery: in the Christian faith, for instance, some of these more mysterious doctrines would be Jesus as the "Son of God", the crucifixion of Jesus for the propitiation for sin, and the Trinity.

<sup>32</sup> Ron Rhodes, *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Muslims* (Harvest House Publishers, 2002); Safa, *Inside Islam*; Ergun Mehmet Caner and Emir Fethi Caner, *Out of the Crescent Shadows: Leading Muslim Women into the Light of Christ* (New Hope Publishers (AL), 2003); Zaka and Coleman, *The Truth About Islam*, 15-19.

Christianity in its New Testament form, and when they understand the claims of Islam as merely unfulfilled human aspirations, they will embrace the former.”<sup>33</sup>

One of the interesting ways in which evangelicals explain away the growth of Islam globally and in the West is through blaming the church. Blame has even been cast on the church for the genesis of Islam for failing to translate the Bible into Arabic in the time of the prophet Muhammad.<sup>34</sup> The spiritual vacuum that evangelicals lament today mirrors in this sense the spiritual vacuum left by the Byzantine Empire that, among other things, contributed to the rise of Islam.

### **Case Study: The A Common Word Initiative**

The post 9/11 context is a fascinating period of time to study evangelicals and Islam. Not in the least is the fact that one particular initiative is, in this researchers opinion, one the most significant developments in Christian Muslim relations since the genesis of Islam. This initiative, named for its major document, A Common Word (ACW), has generated a flurry of evangelical discussion on Islam. The ACW initiative deserves study via a number of different academic angles on each of the nuances of the associated documents and, most importantly, the reactions of the Muslim and Christian communities worldwide. To keep in line with the topic at hand, this section analyzes the ACW initiate as a case study. ACW spawned unprecedented evangelical discourse on Islam which sheds light on the cognitive processes and frames in which evangelicals view Islam and Muslims, as well as how they view themselves and the world.

Analysis of evangelical responses to ACW and subsequent documents is helpful to this

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<sup>33</sup> Larry Poston and Carl F. Ellis, *The changing face of Islam in America: understanding and reaching your Muslim neighbor* (Camp Hill, PA: Horizon Books, 2000), 104.

<sup>34</sup> Keith Swartley and Caleb Project, *Encountering the world of Islam* (Waynesboro GA: Authentic Media, 2005), 10, 35, 37, 326.

paper for the following three reasons. First, the ACW initiative generated significant evangelical discussion on Islam. Some of this discussion happened behind closed doors in the hallways of different follow up conferences and meetings. Much of this discussion was public. Because of the impressive list of signers and the very public nature of the ACW conferences, the details of engaging with Muslims and Islam became a pavement level conversation for evangelicals working in all spheres of ministry, not just those already connected to Muslims. Evangelicals outside of any formal connection to Islamic studies were talking, thinking, praying, and discussing Islam.

Secondly, as the discussion below reveals, the issues that evangelicals discussed most ardently are the same issues which evangelical writers have been mulling over for many years, and especially since 9/11. In this way, the ACW initiative is a microcosm of the broader evangelical discussion on Islam. Each of the categories of evangelical thought described in this paper's taxonomy comes out in evangelical involvement and reaction to ACW.

Thirdly, because of its public nature, ACW as well as the follow up meetings and documents have become a sort of test of evangelical and Muslim sincerity. More evangelical leaders and Muslim leaders than any other initiative in the history of Christian-Muslim relations have endorsed ACW and the documents that followed in response to ACW. Therefore, the public eye is attentive to whether this initiative will actually bring about tangible change to Christian-Muslim relations and global welfare. There is, under the surface, anxiety that if this initiative does not succeed, then Muslims and Christians have little hope for the near future for bringing out truly significant positive reform.

## *Context*

The story really begins on September 12, 2006 in Regensburg, Germany. On that day, the Catholic Pope gave the now infamous Regensburg Address where, in short, he made a careless reference to dialogue between a 14<sup>th</sup> Century Byzantine emperor and a “certain Persian.” In quoting this emperor, he implied that Islam was not a religion of reason, that Muhammad was a bearer of evil, and that Muhammad commanded the spread of Islam by the sword. The reaction of the Muslim world was, to say the least, impassionate. The Pope promptly responded with regret and apology for the negative impact that his speech had on interfaith relations and Muslim sensibilities. There was no lack of variety of response in the Muslim world to the Pope’s ostensible apology. One month after his address, thirty-eight Muslim leaders and scholars sent an open letter to the Pope to initiate a dialogue on the topics of the Regensburg address. In the same vein as the open letter to the Pope, one year later on Oct. 13, 2007, a new and more focused open letter was released and endorsed by an impressive list of 138 Muslim scholars from every school of thought in Islam and every denomination. This new message is called, “A Common Word Between Me and You” (ACW). As one might expect, this document stirred no small reaction from the global media as well as the Christian community from all over the West. The ACW website states the unprecedented nature of this document: “Never before have Muslims delivered this kind of definitive consensus statement on Christianity.”<sup>35</sup>

To be concise, ACW has one main thesis: it is an open hand to the global Christian community to initiate dialogue based on the “common ground” between the two faiths, namely, the belief in the unity of God and the core necessity to love God and neighbor. There is an inescapable seriousness to the document. After all, Islam and Christianity are the two most predominant religions in the world and that they often have found their followers in conflict with

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<sup>35</sup> [www.accommonword.com](http://www.accommonword.com) includes an helpful list of documents and responses to ACW.

each other; the future of the world's welfare depends on the health of the relationship between Islam and Christianity. The document is not, of course, perfect. But it is concise, direct, and at least ostensibly reasonable in its appreciation of the Christian Bible. The Muslim authors of ACW ended with a plea to Christians everywhere to consider Muslims not against them, but with them and to come together with Muslims on the “common essentials of our two religions ... *that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God ... (Aal 'Imran, 3:64).*” The authors desire this “common ground” become the basis for future interfaith dialogue, ultimately, for the purpose of global welfare.

As one might imagine, this immediately led to a firestorm of media and Christian reaction of all kinds. The ACW website includes a helpful list of Christian and non-Christian responses to ACW. ACW was positively received by a number of global Christian organizations and leaders, such as the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Presbyterian Church of America, the National Council of Churches, the United Methodist Council of Bishops, and so on. For the purpose of studying American evangelical thought on Islam, we will consider only one of the responses and the wake it left among evangelicals.

### *Loving God and Neighbor*

Just over a month after ACW was released publicly, The Yale Center for Faith and Culture wrote a response to ACW in which they entitled, “Loving God and Neighbor Together: A Christian Response to A Common Word between Us and You” (hereafter: LGN). The organization organized a very impressive list of evangelical leaders in America to endorse this response and they published the response and the most prominent 300 Christian endorsement signatories in a



full page advertisement in the *New York Times* on November 18, 2009. The list of endorsees is very impressive; as a sample, it included Rick Warren, founder and senior pastor of Saddleback Community Church, Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church, Leith Anderson, megachurch pastor and president of the National Association of Evangelicals, Ray Bakke of Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding, Richard Mouw, President of Fuller Seminary, Jim Wallis, founder of Sojourners, John Stott, the “dean of evangelical pastors”, Robert Schuller, founder of the Crystal Cathedral, and so on. The list of Christians includes elite level scholars, pastors, presidents of seminaries and universities, political activists, and mission organizational leaders.

The general theme of the LGN response was of excitement and agreement with the ACW document: “We receive the open letter as a Muslim hand of conviviality and cooperation extended to Christians worldwide. In this response we extend our own Christian hand in return, so that together with all other human beings we may live in peace and justice as we seek to love God and our neighbors.” The document agrees with ACW regarding the “challenge” of peace in Christian-Muslim relations: “Peaceful relations between Muslims and Christians stand as one of the central challenges of this century, and perhaps of the whole present epoch.” Lastly, the document agrees to the need for interfaith dialogue based on “common love for God and for one another.”

### *Evangelical Critiques of ACW and LGN*

The reaction to the LGN document among evangelicals was stronger than any directed at ACW. There was no lack of inter-evangelical criticisms. The criticisms initially focused on LGN’s positive endorsement of ACW. The critiques then shifted past the original ACW

document to the general Muslim world and to other evangelicals. The critiques of ACW from evangelicals have centered around five main issues: terminology, apologizing for past sins, co-belligerence, theological simplicity, and the over-haste of the LGN response. Incidentally, the Yale Reconciliation Program has responded to each of these critiques with adequacy. The exact veracity of each of these critiques discussed below is not as important for this paper as the mere fact that they were made, who made them, and what they reveal about evangelical thought on Islam.

### *Terminology*

There was wide complaint among evangelicals that the LGN document endorsed a Muslim view of God and betrayed historic Christianity by deemphasizing the divine nature of Jesus Christ. The controversial statement in LGN referred to God as “the All-Merciful One.” Evangelicals complained about the usage of a common term for the God of Islam (*Al-Rahman*). There are two faces to this critique: first, there was the worry that LGN actually endorsed the Muslim view of God. Second, it seemed to many that the LGN document made clear that Muslims and Christians worship the same God. The evangelical powerhouse Focus on the Family released an article that is critical of LGN and the evangelicals who signed it. The article claims that the LGN document “leave[s] the deity of Christ open for discussion.”<sup>36</sup> Gary Bauer is a notable evangelical politician who ran the conservative evangelical advocacy group Family Research Council. He claims that ACW “acknowledged Allah as the God of the Bible.”<sup>37</sup> Al Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and frequent commentator on

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<sup>36</sup> Stephen Adams, “Evangelical Leaders Pledge Common Cause with Islam,” *CitizenLink*, <http://www.citizenlink.org/CLtopstories/A000006202.cfm>.

<sup>37</sup> Gary Bauer, “Can Christians the Muslims Reconcile?,” *HumanEvents.com*, February 4, 2008, <http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=24776&page=1#cl>.

American culture, was vehement in his complaint on this issue: "I think when you address a letter to Muslims and refer to God in their terminology then there is a big problem." The "problem" the Mohler is referring to is the issue of whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God: "But I think the real confusion here is theological and it comes down whether we believe that Muslims and Christians are the same God... The language in this letter is strategically misleading." Mohler's seminary similarly released a statement referencing the All-Merciful One as "the Muslim term for God."<sup>38</sup> Mohler's second major complaint is that the LGN document "marginalized" Jesus Christ because the document used the predicate "Prophet" before Muhammad but it did not use "Lord" before Jesus.<sup>39</sup>

#### *Piper, Love, Taylor, Livingstone*

One of the more interesting interchanges on this issue took place between John Piper, evangelical theologian and senior pastor, two missions to Muslims leaders, Rick Love, Greg Livingstone, and Justin Taylor, an evangelical uber-blogger and co-author with John Piper. The interchange between these four men was made entirely public via John Piper's widely read ministry blog and Justin Taylor's blog which appeals mostly to evangelical pastors and leaders.<sup>40</sup> John Piper is an evangelical theologian and mega church pastor. In 1994, he founded Desiring God Ministries, which has become a hugely influential organization to theologically reformed evangelicals. Piper's theological influence among evangelicals can hardly be understated and will be undoubtedly analyzed for many years to come. Though Piper is primarily a Bible scholar,

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<sup>38</sup> Garrett Wishall, "Christians need clear definition of God in dialogue with Muslims, Mohler says," *The Towers Online*, January 28, 2008, <http://www.towersonline.net/story.php?grp=towers&id=315>.

<sup>39</sup> Albert Mohler, "A 'Common Word' Between Christians and Muslims," The Albert Mohler Radio Program, January 8, 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Links for the articles references in this discussion of the Piper, Love, Livingstone, Taylor interchange are all archived very nicely here: Justin Taylor, "Do Muslims Worship the True God? A Bridge Too Far," Blog, *Between Two Worlds*, February 28, 2008, <http://theologica.blogspot.com/2008/02/do-muslims-worship-true-god-bridge-too.html>.

he also regularly speaks about Christian world missions and Islam. On January 23, 2008 Piper released a video critique of LGN. With his typical intensity, he expressed his “profound disappointment” of the LGN document. He was surprised that some of his friends would sign it. His overall critique of LGN was that he felt it does not express what true Christianity really is; in other words, the document marginalized the supremacy and centrality of Jesus Christ in Christian life and doctrine. He said that LGN sounds like it deemphasizes Jesus, it sounds like “you have a prophet, and we have a prophet.” It calls Muhammad a Prophet and also calls Jesus a Prophet (rather than the Lord). This is a matter of important for Piper because LGN implies that Muslims and Christians worship the same God:

The love of God that we get strength from is the love of God uniquely expressed through Jesus Christ as the propitiation for our sins because he died on the cross and rose again. All of those things Islam radically rejects. So they do not believe in the God we believe in.... And to then talk in vague terms as though the love of God is a common standing place is to deceive, it is to be unclear at best. We don't stand together on a common love of God or a common understanding of God, They don't worship the true God...

Smoothing over these profound differences and then using language to lead the readers of the *New York Times* and then to lead the Muslims to think that we really do have a common vision of the love of God when we don't have even have a common vision of God is not honest, it is not helpful.

Rick Love is the former International Director for Frontiers, an evangelical missions

organization to Muslims. Love is currently on sabbatical as a Post Doctoral Fellow in the Yale Reconciliation Program, which produced the LGN document. Love is one of the friends that Piper expressed surprise at in signing the LGN document. Love replied to Piper, arguing that this is the beginning of a conversation. The LGN document is not trying to be a whole-scale statement on Christianity; rather, this is the starting point for dialogue. "The command to love God and neighbor provides a strong theological bridge that both parties can affirm. This is only a first step, but it is a big step." Love, then made a statement that became the issue of controversy from there on: "I believe that Muslims worship the true God. But I also believe that their view of God falls short of His perfections and beauty as described in the Bible." In other words, the Muslims worship the true God, because there is only one God in existence, but he is incomplete for them and this ignorance is eternally fatal. Piper responded two days with a plea for Christians to not "mislead [Muslims] or give them false hope by saying, 'Muslims worship the true God'." His reasoning again was that they do not worship the true God because they do not worship Jesus. Love countered again almost a month later that while Piper and he agree on apostolic doctrine, the issue at hand is really one of missional practicality, or what Love calls "apostolic practice." Love looks to the apostolic practice of the Christian apostle Paul who looked for a point of contact with his audience. Love argues that LGN merely looks for a similar point of contact, namely, shared values about the love of God and love of neighbor. Justin Taylor then responded to Love six days later with a further rebuttal to Love's argument that Muslims "worship the true God."

Interestingly, Love admits that LGN for him is part of an evangelistic discourse. Thus, as least for Love, LGN is more than just an interfaith dialogue initiative; it is part of a missional strategy to lead Muslims to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Greg Livingstone, who founded the

missions organization that Rick Love formerly led, stated the following about his reasoning for signing the document: "The idea of signing it was to get into the same room as these guys, and then, in the same room, to get one on one with them. There might be a Nicodemus among them, though most of them would be other kinds of Pharisees. But I'll talk to somebody even if his motives for wanting to talk to me might be suspect." Again, this dialogue between Piper, Love, Livingstone, and Taylor, happened in the public view and was, therefore, observed evangelicals and their leaders all over America, and, indeed, the world.

The Piper-Love-Taylor-Livingstone interchange focused on the issue of God vs. Allah and how to rightly conduct mission to Muslims. These are two major issues commonly addressed in evangelical literature on Islam as well as in this thesis. This exchange is so interesting because it happened in the full view of the public between two experts on Islam and two non-experts on Islam. The non-experts were just as engaged as the experts. In this way, the interchange modeled broader evangelical discourse on Islam.

### *Apologizing for Past Sins*

One of the surprising evangelical critiques of LGN concerned an apology that the LGN document made to Muslims for past Christian sins. There were a number of evangelical leaders that critiqued this apology. Once again, Al Mohler's, found the apology confusing and problematic:

I didn't sign the letter because I don't understand how you apologize for the Crusades.

And I am not sure what you are apologizing for in the war on terror. Where it says 'many Christians have been guilty of sinning against our Muslim neighbors.' I don't think that is

the right way to put it, at least. I don't think we associate the United States of America with the Christian church. I think that's a huge problem. For whom are we apologizing and for what are we apologizing? I am sure that all kinds of sin went on with the Crusades on both sides. But I am not going to apologize for the Crusades because I am very thankful that the Muslim effort to reach a conquest of Europe was unsuccessful... Otherwise, we would be speaking Arabic on this program right now, otherwise we would be talking about the Muslim continent of Europe and potentially even of North America for those past centuries

Mohler's comments reveal a reoccurring theme within evangelical discourse on Islam: the pervading anxiety of Muslim infiltration and domination in Europe and in the West.

Another evangelical influence, Brian McLaren responded to Mohler and others on Jim Wallis's Sojourner's blog, "How can we not apologize for our sins? Should we claim we have no sins? Or should we knowingly refuse to acknowledge them? Isn't the humility to confess sins a Christian virtue?" McLaren rebuke was aimed most directly at Focus on the Family for their negative article on LGN. Focus on the Family's *CitizenLink* associate editor Stephen Adams criticized LGN for admitting the sins of Christians "without mentioning Muslim atrocities."<sup>41</sup> Another conservative evangelical writer, Mark Tooley, currently president of the Institute of Religion and Democracy, made the same criticism in on conservative name stay David Horowitz's website: "[LGN] offered regrets for the Crusades and the War on Terror, while eagerly accepting the invite to dialogue with Islam. The Muslim statement, of course, offered no

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<sup>41</sup> Adams, "Evangelical Leaders Pledge Common Cause with Islam."

apologies for Islamist conquests or terror."<sup>42</sup> Others defended signing LGN and the apology. Litfin argued that the pragmatic motive overran his hesitancy to endorse what he called an “unnuanced apology section.” He added that he could sign LGN without compromising his Christian convictions.<sup>43</sup>

The issue at hand is not really whether Christians should apologize for their sins. Nor it is, really, whether there were instances of Christian sin during the Crusades. All professing evangelical Christians would agree that confession of sin is good and Christ like. The real issue, under the surface of this critique, is anxiety over Islam as a civilizational competitor to Christianity. The rivalry with Islam runs deep – so deep that any showing of weakness could be fatal. This comes out clearly in Al Mohler’s statement above that he is very thankful for the Crusades given that they stopped the advance of Islam into Europe. Within his statement is veiled anxiety about the growth of Islam and the potential Islamization of Western culture. As other parts of this paper make clear, this anxiety pervades evangelical discourse on Islam. The most robust response to evangelical anxiety expressed in its critique of LGN’s apology comes from Joseph Cummings, one of the original writers of and signatories of LGN. He explains the connection between this apology and evangelical anxiety over a civilizational conflict with Islam perhaps more clearly than has been stated by an evangelical since 9/11:

The crisis of relations between the Muslim world and the West has put into relief for Christians an issue that previously we were able to ignore: is the Christian faith primarily a civilizational identity, a tribal identity, [that is] we are the Christians, they are the Muslims.

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<sup>42</sup> Mark Tooley, “A Dialogue in Bad Faith,” *FrontPageMag*, January 10, 2008, <http://www.frontpagemag.com/readArticle.aspx?ARTID=29463>.

<sup>43</sup> Ted Olson, “Wheaton College Administrators Remove Names From Christian-Muslim Statement,” Blog, *Christianity Today*, February 8, 2008, [http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctliveblog/archives/2008/02/wheaton\\_college.html](http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctliveblog/archives/2008/02/wheaton_college.html).



Or is it about primarily about discipleship to Jesus Christ. Because if it primarily a civilizational, cultural, tribal identity, then that has certain implications for saying, “hey we’re not going to apologize to them until they apologize to us, they’ve done bad things to us.” But if the Christian faith is primarily about following Jesus Christ, well Jesus says, take the log out of your own eyes first before you try to take the specs out of other people’s eyes. Jesus says, see how I lay down my life in love for others, you should follow me in laying down your life in love for others. Obviously, for all Christians it is a little bit of both, their Christian faith is partly a cultural, civilizational identity and partly about following Jesus Christ. But the crisis...is forcing us to decide which is primary for us because that will lead us in different directions in how we respond to the Muslim community.<sup>44</sup>

Cummings is correct. Evangelicals who disdained LGN’s apology were, in fact, offended that ACW did not include an apology. LGN, in this sense, is not just an interfaith document; rather, it was an indication of power.

### *Co-belligerence*

Complaints also surfaced regarding holding interfaith discussions on love of neighbor with Muslims given the routine persecution of Christians in the Muslim world. It is important to note that the Muslim world is massively guilty of systematic persecution of Christians. Thirty-nine of the top fifty countries where Christians are persecuted are Muslim majority countries.<sup>45</sup> The persecution of Christians in the Muslim world is a staple of American evangelical international

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<sup>44</sup> “Christian-Muslim Relations,” Front & Center with Ray Hardman, April 14, 2008, <http://www.cpb.org/program/front-amp-center-ray-hardman/episode/christian-muslim-relations>.

<sup>45</sup> “World Watch List” (Open Doors, 2009).

concerns. In fact, news of often unrestrained persecution of Christians at the hands of Muslims routinely adds fuel to the fire of evangelical disdain of Islam and the Muslim world. There was, therefore, naturally the complaint that LGN did not mention this persecution while endorsing the notion that the love of neighbor (of any religion) is central to Islamic doctrine, which is a point central to ACW. Chuck Colson, one of the most influential conservative evangelical voices stated, "The position I took immediately was Christians ought not to respond until Islam scholars will renounce violence." He continued, "So these guys, [these] imams, may be well meaning, but until they're ready to renounce violence, I'm not ready to talk to them. I think it's a mistake to talk to them."<sup>46</sup> Other prominent evangelicals who publicly agreed with this critique were Gary Bauer, Patrick Sookhdeo, and Keith Pavlischek, of the Ethics and Public Policy Center. A number of ecclesiastical groups responded publicly to ACW stating their concern for the lack of religious freedom to convert and/or the persecution of Christians in Muslim countries. A sample of these include: the Baptist World Alliance, the Mennonite Church USA, the World Evangelical Alliance, Columbia Theological Seminary, and the Disciples of Christ (mainline Protestant).

### *Theological Simplicity*

ACW and LGN also faced the charge of theological simplicity. This charged was two fold. First, some felt that LGN over simplified the Christian notion of love. That is, one cannot say that Muslims and Christians mean the same thing when they use the word "love." Secondly, some questioned the theological accuracy of the document. This was one of the critiques of John Piper, namely, that because of its simplicity the document did not adequately express the central of Jesus Christ in all things. In fact, some hinted that LGN touched on syncretism. The LGN

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<sup>46</sup> Allie Martin, "Colson calls for caution on Muslim call for unity," *OneNewsNow*, February 19, 2008, <http://www.onenewsnow.com/Culture/Default.aspx?id=67553>.

committee responded to this critique arguing that LGN is merely a starting point for dialogue. Dialogue builds trust and healthy relationships that, in turn, open doors to communicate the Gospel as well as the richness of Christianity.

### *Over Haste*

The charge that LGN was too hastily produced stems from the other critiques. The release of ACW mandated a response from the evangelical world. No response would have gained the complete approbation of the evangelical community. Leith Anderson, the President of the NAE, admitted that there were lines in LGN that he would write differently, but expediency and pragmatism in the process of creation of a jointly held document like LGAN led him to sign: “There was simply no easy way to process the complexities of this inter-faith communiqué on short notice.” Others who put forward this critique were and Duane Litfin, Wheaton College President, and Keith Pavlischek, of the Ethics and Public Policy Center.<sup>47</sup>

### *Conclusion*

This case study illustrates how evangelical discourse has become the domain of evangelicals outside of subject experts. Like never before, evangelical leaders discussed Islam in their offices, publications, and homes and how to effectively engage the Muslim world. Despite the criticism, ACW and LGN provided a foundational framework on which to enhance Muslim-Christian relations. In these respects, ACW and LGN were successful.

The ACW and LGN initiative highlights several of the main questions within evangelical thought on Islam. First, is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad? This question drives

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<sup>47</sup> Olson, “Wheaton College Administrators Remove Names From Christian-Muslim Statement”; Keith Pavlischek, “Why I Would Not Have Signed the Yale Response to ‘A Common Word,’” *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 6, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 61-63.

straight to the core of evangelical theological convictions. Secondly, should Christians engage positively with Muslims while their coreligionists all over the world are persecuted at the hands of Muslims? Christians can engage in dialogue and try to reform the Muslim world through persuasion or by trying to redefine what it means to be a Muslim.

## CHAPTER 6: RESPONSE TO ISLAM

After 9/11, evangelicalism swarmed with discussions on Islam, Muslims, and the Middle East. Every major evangelical magazine, newspaper, and website began (if not already) to address topics related to Islam. There was noticeable growth of evangelical books written on Islam. Because of the flurry of news coverage on Islam and related topics, Islam became a dinnertime topic for many evangelicals; even relative non-experts on Islam, started to write books on Islam. As an example, James Garlow wrote *A Christian's Response to Islam* (2005) after he sent an email to his friends laying out his position on Islam. He was provoked to write this email letter after hearing that another church congregation had invited Muslims to attend church following 9/11-01 and that the congregation had reportedly applauded their Muslim visitors. After receiving “more than seven hundred” emails in response to his letter, he decided to turn his letter into a book. Most interestingly, though, is that before the incident involving his email, James Garlow admits that he only had tangential exposure to Islam through his graduate degree programs on the history of Christianity. After 9/11 and his fateful email, he met with Muslim converts to Christianity, started reading about Islam, and took a course on Muslim countries. In other words, 9/11 turned this ordinary evangelical pastor into a published author on Islam and appropriate Christian responses to Islam.

The question of Garlow's book is the question for analysis in this chapter: “How should Christians react to Islam?” Most simple, this is the question, “so what?” Chapters 2-5 focused on classes of thought and themes within evangelical literature on Islam. This

chapter focuses on the effect of this literature. In other words, how does the literature actually effect evangelical action towards Muslims?

My taxonomy of evangelical thought on Islam is helpful to understand the effect of evangelical thought on evangelical action. The taxonomy lists the ways in which evangelicals think about Islam. Stepping back a step further, the taxonomy also reveals meta impulses within evangelical thought. Many books fall into more than one category in the taxonomy. These overlaps are listed below along with a surprising conclusion.

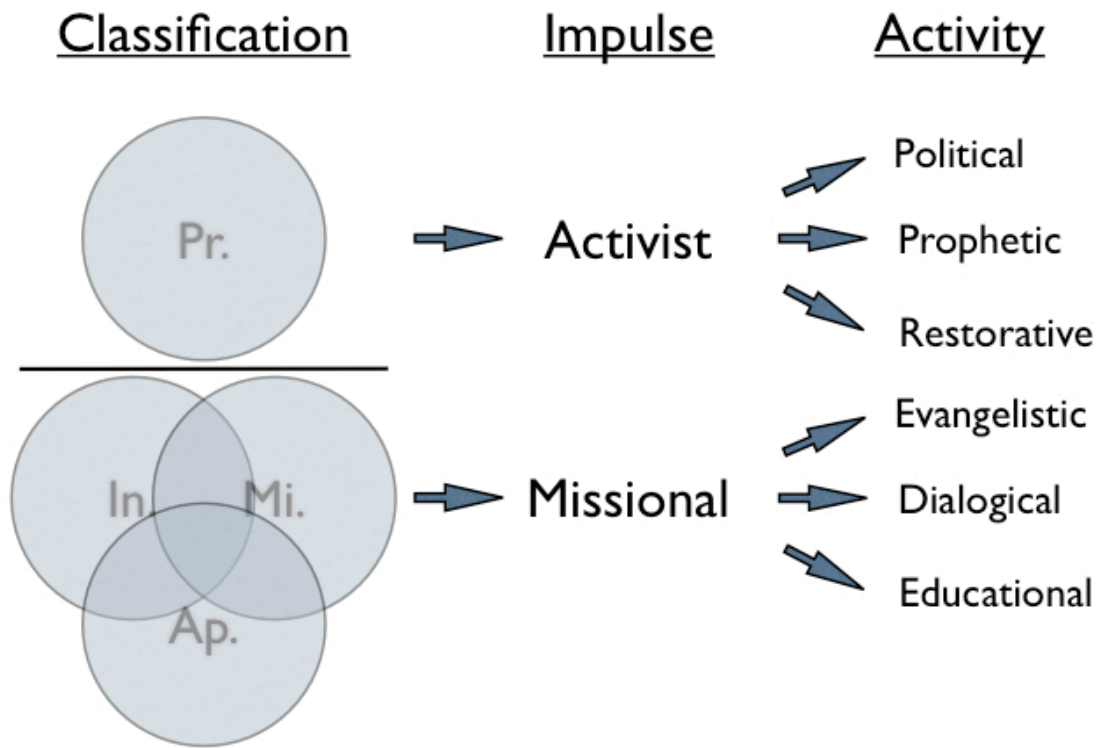
*Informational – Missional.* These books typically present the reader with an overview of Islam, or some facet thereof, in order to help the reader live missionally (declaring the Christian Gospel in word and deed) among Muslims.

*Apologetic - Missional.* These are written for the defense Christianity from Islam but also as a model of how to defend Christianity. Interestingly, most apologetic books are missional in the sense that they help an evangelical share their faith with Muslims. Some books in this category are even written explicitly for a Muslim audience.

*Informational – Apologetic.* These books are more academic as their authors are not interested as much in equipping Christians to interact with Muslims; rather, they are interested in the apologetics debate between Islam and Christianity.

When plotting these overlaps on a simple Venn diagram (Figure 1), one immediately notices a distinct separation between the prophetic class and the informational, apologetic, and missional classes. This is a significant finding for the following reasons. First, this clarifies the relationship between the different categories within the taxonomy. Second, the two vertical poles of the Venn diagram lead the reader to two different reactions. The prophetic class propels the reader towards an *activist impulse*. This impulse leads towards activity that is political (e.g., the United States should curb the influence of Iran given its existential and eschatological conflict with Israel) or prophetic (e.g., Christians should rally in prayer networks for the peace of Jerusalem and the livelihood of the Jews) or restorative (the church or the US is to blame, therefore, we should fix their problems). The Informational-Apologetic-Missional overlap, on the other hand, leads the reader to a *missional impulse*. This missional impulse leads evangelicals to three types of actions: evangelistic, dialogical, and educational. This missional impulse is distinct from the activist impulse in at least two ways: first, the missional impulse tends to involve more individualistic action, rather than corporate activism. Second, the missional impulse finds itself often in tension with the activist impulse over the effects of political activism on evangelistic activity.

**Figure 1**



## **Activist**

### *Political Activity*

The way that evangelicals think about Islam influences how they engage with the public sector. The most illustrative place where theology, perceptions of Islam, and politics come together is evangelical Christian Zionism. The impact of Christian Zionism on public policy is well documented.<sup>1</sup> Christian Zionism obviously lends itself towards antagonistic perceptions of Islam and Muslims.

<sup>1</sup> Paul C. Merkley, *The Politics of Christian Zionism 1891-1948*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 1998); Paul Merkley, *Christian attitudes towards the state of Israel* (Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001); Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: road map to Armageddon?* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2004); Timothy Weber, *On the road to Armageddon: how evangelicals became Israel's best friend* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004); John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign*



There have been, though, several different initiatives to counter antagonistic portrayals of Muslims as well as premillennial dispensationalist influence on policy making towards the Middle East. In 1986, Ray Bakke, an American evangelical social engineer and founder of International Urban Associates, along with Don Wagner, founded Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding (EMEU). EMEU is a response to the "rising tide of western interpretation of the nation of Israel as the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy" that "threatens not only peace in the region, but also the Christian communities, especially those of the occupied Palestinian territories." EMEU is a network that facilitates conversations about the Middle East crises, the Middle East church, and mission to the Middle East. In the past, their conferences have hosted representatives from World Vision, the Southern Baptist Convention, Intervarsity, Mercy Corps, and Young Life, among others. While the exact impact of EMEU on shaping evangelical thought on Islam, the Middle East, and Muslims in general is unknown, the organization has been a gathering point for evangelicals concerned about the church of the Middle East as well as the dominant paradigm of Western evangelical thought towards Islam.

Ray Bakke participated in another major attempt to redirect the impressions of the world regarding evangelicals and the Middle East. On July 27, 2007 thirty-nine evangelical leaders, academic and pastoral, signed and published in the *New York Times* a letter to President Bush thanking him for reinvigorating the Palestine-Israel negotiations.

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*Policy*, 1st ed. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008); Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism*, illustrated edition. (Yale University Press, 2007); Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2008).

The signatories avowed their support of a two state solution and implicitly critiqued Christian Zionism:

We also write to correct a serious misperception among some people including some U.S. policymakers that all American evangelicals are opposed to a two-state solution and creation of a new Palestinian state that includes the vast majority of the West Bank. Nothing could be further from the truth. We, who sign this letter, represent large numbers of evangelicals throughout the U.S. who support justice for both Israelis and Palestinians.

The letter is clearly as much for the audience of the Bush administration as for other American evangelicals. The signatories knew what they were doing; this was an attempt to influence their contemporaries and push back on traditional evangelical blind support for Israel.<sup>2</sup> The signatory list was fairly unsurprising. Almost each of them had already staked their image as evangelical but not Zionist. Ron Sider, founder of Evangelicals for Social Action topped the list. Other names include Tony Campolo, president of the Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education, Joel Hunter, senior pastor at a mega church in Orlando, Richard Stearns, president of World Vision, and Jim Wallis, president of Sojourners.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> As evidence of this point, note how Jim Wallis refers to this letter as a new evangelical initiative in his justification for signing. Jim Wallis, "Politics Pushes Uneven Policies," *Sojourners*, September 17, 2007, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-wallis/politics-pushes-uneven-po\\_b\\_64749.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-wallis/politics-pushes-uneven-po_b_64749.html).

<sup>3</sup> The letter as well as the full list of signatories is found at "Letter to President George W. Bush," July 27, 2007, <http://www.esa-online.org/Display.asp?Page=LettertoPresident>.

The day after President Obama's historic Cairo speech on June 4, 2009, there was another letter sent to the current president urging him to focus on the Palestine-Israel conflict and to push for a two state solution. Fifty-four prominent Christian leaders signed this letter. This time they were from among evangelicals as well as mainline Protestants and Catholics. Once again, this letter reads as much as a plea to fellow Christians as it was to the President. Notable new evangelical names on this signatory list include Dennis Hollinger, president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, an evangelical bastion in America's northeast, and Bill Hybels, senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, the fourth largest church in America and, by the account of one pollster, the most influential church in America.<sup>4</sup>

Is it too early to tell whether evangelicals are channeling away from an End Times hermeneutic towards a more irenic and practical approach to the Palestine-Israel conflict as well to Islam in general. The ballasts of dispensationalism are sturdy; but the two letters mentioned above may foreshadow things to come. Another terrorist attack on America by Muslim perpetrators, though, could mute these efforts.

### *Prophetic Activity*

Prophetic works on Islam fuel the activist impulse. In turn, the activist impulse promotes prophetic activity. This activity is hard to track, since it is localized and

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<sup>4</sup> "Top 50 Most Influential Churches in America," *Church Report*, [http://www.thechurchreport.com/mag\\_article.php?mid=1095&mname=July](http://www.thechurchreport.com/mag_article.php?mid=1095&mname=July); "The 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America," *Time*, February 7, 2005, <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101050207/index.html>; "Letter to President Obama," June 4, 2009, <http://www.esa-online.org/images/mmDocument/Declarations%20&%20Letters/Letter%20to%20Pres%20Obama%2006%2004%2009.pdf>.

amorphous. The most fervent prophecy guru who is constantly giving himself to prophetic activities is Peter Wagner. Wagner was a professor at Fuller Seminary before co-founding the World Prayer Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado and Global Harvest Ministries. In his books, he calls his readers to get involved in prayer and action networks that respond to the working of God and to prophecy.

The most important prophetic activity happens on the personal level. The prophecy books lead Christians to pray and plan accordingly for future events. A dispensationalist paradigm for the End Times tends to drain social action energies since the world is “going to hell in a hand basket.”

### *Restorative Activity*

The activist impulse also drives evangelicals to restorative action within the church and their society. One of the reoccurring claims within evangelical discourse on Islam is that the growth of Islam is due to failures by the church, society, or the government. The “blame” is essentially cast all around. The “solution” to the challenge of Islam includes reforming the church, society, and government.

Lying beneath this blame casting is a fundamental confusion in the evangelical conscience regarding the rapid growth of Islam. Norman Daniel explains this same confusion as it appeared in the medieval context: the domination of Muslim forces in the latter Crusades, including their recapturing of the Holy Lands, he says, “constituted a theological problem that would greatly exercise contemporary Christian thought.” The theological problem stems from a belief that God sovereignly guides history: how is it

that God's people who are fulfilling his will are so devastated by Muslim forces of evil? John Tolan, in *Saracens*, also explained this conundrum in the mediaeval context. The resemblances to the contemporary period are striking:

All these authors struggled with the same troubling questions: why should God allow the Muslims to conquer (and maintain) huge territories and to reduce their Christian inhabitants to the status of *dhimmi*? Was it because God preferred Islam? ... That could not, of course, be the response of the authors who chose to remain Christian; they needed other explanations. In other words, they had to adapt to the concepts of Christian theology and Christian historiography to explain Islam to their Christian readers. In so doing, they had to convince their readers of the superiority of Christianity, of the need to remain steadfast in the ancestral faith.<sup>5</sup>

Daniel lists five ways that Christians in the medieval age coped with this theological conundrum. All five of these ways are astoundingly present in twenty-first century evangelical thought on Islam. First, medieval Christians turned to prophecy. Prophecy assuages Christian grief by providing a theological answer to Christendom's loss – God is working through their loss to, in the end, exalt his people and establish His Kingdom. Secondly, some medieval writers interpreted Muslim triumph as divine judgment – judgment on Christians and perhaps even on Muslims, as their present triumph might lead

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<sup>5</sup> John V. Tolan, *Saracens* (Columbia University Press, 2002), 41.

to future despair. Thirdly, Muslim triumph was seen as a sign of God's loving discipline. In this way, physical defeat was interpreted as divine discipline from a just Father. Lastly, the most frequent explanation, Daniel notes, was that in their defeat, God was punishing them for their sins and/or their allowance of sin and heresy in the church.<sup>6</sup> These same rationalizations appear both in the Muslim world regarding the dominance of Christianity,<sup>7</sup> as well as among evangelical Christians regarding the ascendancy of Islam.

Just as in the medieval period, the most common response to ascendancy of Islam in the West and around the world is blaming the church and society. This blame begins with the church of the six and seventh century. Timothy George quotes British Christian missionary to the Muslim world, William Henry Temple Gairdner, saying, "Islam was a perpetual reminder to Christendom of the latter's failure truly to represent her Lord. For if she had done so, Muhammad would have been a Christian."<sup>8</sup> The *Encountering the World of Islam* textbook several times infers that one of the reasons for the genesis and rapid growth of Islam was the failure of the church to translate the Bible into Arabic.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: the Making of an Image*, reprint. (Oneworld, 1993), 150-152.

<sup>7</sup> This is also the exact question that the Muslim world dealt with during the modern colonial period. As an example, the great scholar Albert Hourani recounts how the 19th century Muslim intellectual Jamal al-Din al-Afghani dealt with this problem: "Al-Afghani resolves the paradox by saying that neither the achievements of Christian countries nor the failure of Muslim countries are due to their religions. The Christian peoples grew strong because the Church grew up within the walls of the Roman Empire and incorporated its pagan beliefs and virtues; the Muslim peoples grew weak because the truth of Islam was corrupted by successive waves of falsity. *Christians are strong because they are not really Christian; Muslims are weak because they are not really Muslim.*" (italics added). Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 129.

<sup>8</sup> Timothy George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?* (Zondervan, 2002), 41. Gairdner championed the thesis of Islam's growth due to the weaknesses and failure of the church in his book *The Rebuke of Islam*, originally published as *The Reproach of Islam* in 1909. This book was so popular it went through five editions. The book is accessible online at <http://openlibrary.org/details/thereproachofisl00gaiduoft>.

<sup>9</sup> Keith Swartley and Caleb Project, *Encountering the world of Islam* (Waynesboro GA: Authentic Media, 2005), 10, 37, 35, 326; Patrick Johnstone, "Bible Translation and the Cross-Cultural DNA of the Church," *Momentum Magazine* (February 2006): 29-33.

Additionally, confusion over the nature of Christ resulted in heresies such as Monophysitism and Nestorianism, which clouded the understanding of Arab's of the Prophet Muhammad's time. Evangelicals today also blame the church in the global West and the global East for the growing influence of Islam because the church has not yet shared the Gospel with the majority of Muslims.<sup>10</sup> The more the church becomes castrated in its leadership, values, and ministries, the more Islam will appeal to its people.

9/11 was a wake up call to the church and society for many evangelicals. The church needs to "wake up" and be ready to face the challenge of Islam. Francis Frangipane leverages the impact of 9/11 to mobilize his audience to physical and spiritual action:

The terrorist acts of September 11 jarred us to look into the face of this demonically manipulated world of Islamic fundamentalism. He is now empowering us to war against it on two fronts: militarily and spiritually through prayer. His goal is to use the U.S. and our allies to stop Islam's quest for world domination.<sup>11</sup>

Cultural and religious relativism that the church has sometimes appeased are also to blame for the rise of Islam. Evangelicals are obsessed with avoiding theological and moral relativism. Hence, the motto of the National Association of Evangelicals is

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<sup>10</sup> Reza F. Safa, *Inside Islam: Exposing and Reaching the World of Islam* (Creation House, 1997), 10; Mark A. Gabriel, *Islam and Terrorism: What the Quran Really Teaches About Christianity, Violence and the Goals of the Islamic Jihad* (Creation House, 2002), 217.

<sup>11</sup> Francis Frangipane, *This Day We Fight!: Breaking the Bondage of a Passive Spirit* (Chosen, 2005), 162.

“cooperation without compromise.” Moral relativism castrates the War on Terror because it tends to restrain from “condemning terrorism for all the evil that it is.”<sup>12</sup> Bassam Madany argues that western Christians should realize that if they do not seek the restructuring of their society then they are in fact aiding and abetting Islamic evangelism within America. Muslims, Madany argues, are engaged in a “counter offensive, endeavoring to convince Europeans and Americans that Islam can bring order to the chaotic moral and spiritual conditions of Western society.” If the church does not reform itself, Islam will reform America.

## **Missional Impulse**

### *Evangelistic Activity*

The missional impulse manifests itself most predominantly in evangelistic activity. Simply put, evangelism means declaring and demonstrating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to Muslims. Overwhelmingly, evangelicals support evangelism of Muslims inside the U.S. and abroad. According to a 2002 poll, 89% of evangelicals believe that it is “very important” to “insist on the truth of the Gospel” to Muslims; 83% believe it is “very important to evangelize U.S. Muslims; and 81% believe it is “very important” to evangelize Muslims abroad.<sup>13</sup>

Evangelicals often speak of evangelism to Muslims with the language of liberation; Muslims are held in bondage by sin, evil, their religion, their culture, or the

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<sup>12</sup> Grant Jeffrey, *The next world war: what prophecy reveals about extreme Islam and the West*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs Colo.: Waterbrook Press, 2006), 114.

<sup>13</sup> “Evangelical Views of Islam,” *Beliefnet*, <http://www.beliefnet.com/News/Politics/2003/04/Evangelical-Views-Of-Islam.aspx>.



Devil himself and they, therefore, need spiritual and, often, physical liberation.

Evangelical books on Islam often aim to help emancipate Muslims “one soul at a time.”<sup>14</sup>

The first effect of the literature is increased motivation to “expose” Islam and to free Muslims from the bondage of Islam and the Devil. The method of liberation is Christian evangelism of Muslims. World evangelization is a direct counter attack to the “Islamic agenda” for world domination. As a result, almost every major evangelical missions agency offers training on evangelizing Muslims. There are a number of other organizations in the United States that mobilize and equip evangelical Christians specifically to evangelize Muslims. A few of the more influential ones are Crescent Project, Horizons International, and Gospel for Muslims.

### *Dialogical Activity*

Approximately 54% of evangelicals believe that dialogue with Muslims is “very important” and 41% believe it has “some importance.” That makes for an overwhelming 95% of evangelicals that attribute importance to dialogue with Muslims.<sup>15</sup> There have been a few cooperative literary attempts to promote better relations with the Muslim world. First, there is the A Common Word/Loving God and Neighbor initiative, which is the case study of chapter 5. Secondly, the Institute on Religion and Democracy wrote and released a guide for churches on Christian-Muslim dialogue. This is a solidly irenic, evangelical set of “dos and don’ts” that emphasizes respect for Islam and Muslims, the

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<sup>14</sup> Anees Zaka and Diane Coleman, *The Truth About Islam: The Noble Qur'an's Teachings in Light of the Holy Bible* (P & R Publishing, 2004), 156.

<sup>15</sup> “Evangelical Views of Islam.”

use of appropriate language, sincere engagement between the parties with the issues that divide Christians and Muslims, and the avoidance of over simplification.<sup>16</sup> Thirdly, the “Grace and Truth Task Force,” which is a “global network of Christians who love, serve, and live among Muslims,” has produced “An Affirmation” of their convictions as well as “An Exposition” of that affirmation in fuller detail. This Affirmation and Exposition push a respectful, missional approach to engaging Islam and Muslims. In these two documents, they affirm nine “Biblical guidelines that can enable Jesus’ followers to serve as his representatives in relationship with Muslims of every persuasion.”<sup>17</sup> Evangelistic mission is the primary force shaping their thought on Islam.

Most nonliterary evangelistic initiatives happen on the individual or local level. McDowell and Zaka pioneered an approach to community level dialogue between Muslims and Christians. They push for evangelism through community dialogues called “Meetings for Better Understanding,” where local Christians and Muslims can come together in a semiofficial environment to converse about questions that are foundational to each of their faiths. They claim that these kinds of meetings have happened in cities all over the United States.<sup>18</sup>

Other evangelical leaders have engaged in activity that expresses their sincere appreciation of Islam and Muslims. The evangelical president of Fuller Theological

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<sup>16</sup> Alan Wisdom, “Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Guide for Churches” (Institute on Religion & Democracy, May 2003), <http://www.theird.org/Page.aspx?pid=1082>.

<sup>17</sup> 1. Be faithful to God’s Truth- the whole truth. 2. Be Jesus-Centered in our Communication. 3. Be truthful and gracious in our words and witness. 4. Be wise in our words and witness. 5. Be respectful and bold in our witness. 6. Be prudent in our Google-ized world. 7. Be persistent in our call for religious freedom. 8. Be peaceable and uncompromising in our dialogue. 9. Be loving toward all. At the time of this writing, these documents and the list of their signatories are unpublished.

<sup>18</sup> Bruce McDowell and Anees Zaka, *Muslims and Christians at the Table: Promoting Biblical Understanding Among North American Muslims* (Phillipsburg N.J.: P&R Pub., 1999).

Seminary, Richard Mouw, for instance, expressed that the Muslims he knew motivated him to fast during the season of Ramadan. He publicly called other evangelical Christians to do the same.<sup>19</sup>

Rick Warren has modeled for evangelical leaders how to engage Muslim groups in a healthy manner. Warren, the pastor of Saddleback church in Lake Forest, California, is often acclaimed as the heir to Billy Graham as “America’s minister.”<sup>20</sup> His approach to Islam and Muslims does not differ in tone or intent from his initiatives on other global issues, such as poverty, health, education, and the epidemic of poor leadership. The foremost example of his approach to the topic of Islam is his 2009 keynote speech for the Muslim Public Affairs Council annual convention. In his opening remarks, he declared, “I love Muslims!” While appreciative of Muslims and Islam, Warren’s ambition is absolutely missional – he wants Muslims to know and follow Jesus Christ. He argues that disagreement with Muslims should not keep any Christian from loving Muslims.

The work of the Institute for Global Engagement, Bob Roberts, and the National Association of Evangelicals are contemporary missional models that promote interfaith and diplomatic activism. The Institute for Global Engagement (IGE), a Washington D.C. based think tank, was founded in 2000 by Robert Seiple, the first-ever U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom (1998 to 2000). The mission of IGE is to “promote sustainable environments for religious freedom worldwide. It studies the impact of faith on state and society, it encourages governments to protect religious

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Mouw, “An Evangelical Fasts During Ramadan,” *Beliefnet*, <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Christianity/Protestant/Evangelical/An-Evangelical-Fasts-During-Ramadan.aspx>.

<sup>20</sup> David Van Biema et al., “TIME: 25 Most Influential Evangelicals Photo Essay: Rick Warren,” *Time*, February 7, 2005, <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101050207/photoessay/>.

freedom, and it equips citizens to exercise that freedom responsibly.” In other words, IGE advocates for the place of religion in international diplomacy making – and they are modeling on a practical level what that means. They have significant work in Vietnam, Laos, and Pakistan. In Pakistan’s Northwest Frontier, they have engaged in peacemaking and policy shaping without shrouding their religious convictions. Robert Seiple and his son, Chris Seiple, who is the current President of IGE, are evangelical Christians. IGE publishes a journal *The Review of Faith and International Affairs*, which is the only journal devoted to analyzing the role of religion in global affairs. This journal has featured a number of evangelical contributors, as well as non-Christian contributors, that have tackled issues such as the role of Christian missions in nonwestern societies, the role of religion in shaping foreign policy, evangelism and the persecuted Christian church, and the Christian response to suffering.

Another major advocate within evangelicalism for dialogical activity with Muslims is Bob Roberts Jr. In his response to Islam, Roberts overlaps between missional and activist. He is a former board member of IGE and Texas megachurch pastor.<sup>21</sup> Roberts is a fascinating leader within American evangelicalism. In one sense he fits the stereotypical evangelical mold: he is a tall, Texas megachurch pastor who does not hide

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<sup>21</sup> The way Roberts defines “mission” expresses his engaging approach towards Muslims. Mission means finding ways to show God’s love and greatness in the world. It means living out the love of Jesus by serving and loving others, and building respectful relations with them. My Muslim friends are just as rooted in their faith as I am in mine, they pray just as hard as I do – I know, I watch them, with respect. Sure I wish they were Christian, and they wish I was Muslim – but most of the time, we focus our energy on how we can improve the world together. Take the Middle East, for example. I believe in the safety and security of Israel, and I believe in freedom and dignity for the Palestinians. That’s a vision we can all work for together. I call it ‘Kingdom work.’ Eboo Patel, “The Faith Divide: An Evangelical Open Hand to the Muslim World,” *On Faith*, May 4, 2009, [http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/eboo\\_patel/2009/05/an\\_evangelical\\_open\\_hand\\_to\\_th.html](http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/eboo_patel/2009/05/an_evangelical_open_hand_to_th.html).

his east Texas drawl. In another sense, he is a glaring abnormality: he regularly speaks about this compassion and deep friendships with Muslims and he works groups such as the Interfaith Youth Council, the United Nations, the Council of Foreign Relations, and the U.S. Islamic World Forum. His books do not offer any new theory or new method of engagement; rather, their impact stems from the fact that they are written by a Texan evangelical pastor who can write with strength on matters of globalization, foreign affairs, and, even, Islam. Through his leadership at his church in Keller, Texas and his books that bring together the dynamics of globalization and mission, Roberts is a formidable leader within American evangelicalism on how to engage Muslims personally and as a local church congregation.

Another major force within evangelicalism that promotes dialogical activity is the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). Founded in 1942, the umbrella group claims to represent sixty denominations with about 45,000 churches. Its constituency includes organizations, churches, and schools numbering over thirty million people. The NAE regularly addresses the most pressing evangelical and public policy issues of the day. Since 2001, due to the tremendous influence of its Vice President for Government Affairs, Richard Cizik, the NAE has not feared addressing Islam and Muslims. In late April 2003, the NAE along with the Institute for Religion and Democracy (IRD) convened a forum and issued a document calling Christian leaders to seek understanding with Muslim people and communicate their respect, but not agreement with Islam.<sup>22</sup> In

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<sup>22</sup> Mark Stricherz, "Evangelicals Advise on Muslim Dialogue," *Christianity Today*, July 2003, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/july/13.21.html>; Wisdom, "Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Guide for Churches."

May of 2003, Cizik, the IRD, and other evangelical leaders went to Morocco for a consultation on Islam with Moroccan leaders that addressed issues such as human rights, religious freedom, and democracy. They also paved the way for greater Christian influence in Morocco.<sup>23</sup> Evangelical leaders, including Cizik, joined together in July 2007 with Arab leaders to seek relational healing and to pave a new path for relations between the two religions. Evangelical leaders present at this meeting included Jonathan Fallwell, the son of Jerry Falwell and heir to his ministry, Gordon Robertson of the 700 Club, Paul Crouch Jr. of Trinity Broadcasting Network, Christian lobbyist Ralph Reed, Richard Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals, Vernon Brewer of WorldHelp, and the organizer, evangelist Benny Hinn.<sup>24</sup> Some of the evangelical elite are quietly paving better, more diplomatic relations with the Muslim world. But the difference will come when that elite rapprochement filters down to the popular level. That has not happened as of yet.

### *Educational Activity*

The missional impulse also drives missional education on Islam. Two of the most influential American evangelical initiatives are the adult education courses *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* and *Encountering the World of Islam*. The *Perspectives* course (as it is most commonly known) began in 1974 and continues to this day. It is by far the most influential adult missions course within Western evangelicalism.

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<sup>23</sup> Stan Guthrie, "Q & A: Rich Cizik," *Christianity Today*, June 2004, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/june/2.21.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Falwell, "Christians and Muslims in Historic Meeting," *WorldNetDaily*, July 7, 2007, [http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE\\_ID=56552](http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=56552).

According to the *Perspectives* website, over 70,000 people have taken the course in North America; over 30,000 people in other countries have taken the course; and each year there are over 200 extant classes with an average 7,000 or more people. The administrative structure includes 10 national employees, 14 regional directors, over 200 class coordinators, and over 1,000 volunteer coordinating team members.<sup>25</sup> While the fifteen-week course teaches on more than just Muslim peoples, much of its curriculum and traveling circuit of speakers focus on Islam and Muslims. The ambition of this course is to mobilize “world Christians.” The course calls its participants to engage with Muslims in word and deed for the sake of the Gospel.

The second most influential course calling evangelical Christians to evangelize Muslims grew out of the *Perspectives* course, but it concentrates solely on Muslims and Islam. It is called *Encountering the World of Islam*. Developed by Keith Swartley, the course reader and lesson objectives are emphatically missional. This twelve-week course began in 1992 and has replicated its classes in the style of *Perspectives* in dozens of locations around the United States. It focuses on the foundations and initial expansion of Islam, Islamic culture, the relationship between Christianity and Islam, and what the response of Christians should be to Muslims. This course calls its hearers to an emphatic missional lifestyle towards Muslims. This includes sharing the Gospel with them in word and deed.

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<sup>25</sup> In 1974 it was called the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Information on the course can be found at [www.perspectives.org](http://www.perspectives.org).

## Conclusion

The missional initiatives of American evangelicals and their churches have become transnational due to the advance of globalization. This poses particular opportunities and risks for the evangelical cause. While scholars such as Philip Jenkins, Andrew Walls, Samuel Escobar, and Mark Noll have popularized the idea that Christianity is truly global and its center is undoubtedly staked in the global south, American Christianity still disproportionately influences global Christianity and global affairs.<sup>26</sup> Globalization presents an exponential number of opportunities to the individual evangelical, and more so for their church, to influence the world. The extant risk, though, is that evangelicals will influence the world in a direction that is *de facto* disadvantageous for its own mission. For instance, American evangelicals have perpetrated dispensational theology to the entire globe. The way that some evangelicals have handled dispensationalism and its applications to international affairs has disadvantageously affected the public opinion of evangelicals in the Muslims world, the very people that these dispensationalists would like to “reach” with the Gospel. This should draw out healthy hesitation among evangelicals in their activism.

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<sup>26</sup> Mark Noll, *The new shape of world Christianity: how American experience reflects global faith* (Downers Grove Ill.: IVP Academic, 2009); Samuel Escobar, *The new global mission: the Gospel from everywhere to everyone* (Downers Grove Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003); Philip Jenkins, *The new faces of Christianity: believing the Bible in the global south* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Philip Jenkins, *The next Christendom: the coming of global Christianity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Andrew Walls, “World Christianity, the Missionary Movement and the Ugly American,” in *World Order and Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Andrew Walls, *The missionary movement in Christian history: studies in the transmission of faith* (Maryknoll N.Y.; Edinburgh: Orbis Books; T&T Clark, 1996); Robert Wuthnow, *Boundless faith: the global outreach of American churches* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).



## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Islam is unique in that it currently dominates western evangelical discourse on world religions. It occupies spaces of conversation within American evangelicalism that are not occupied by other non-Jewish world religions.<sup>1</sup> In the past, world religions were the expertise of Christian apologists and missiologists. Now the blogosphere and popular Christian bookracks are full of evangelical exposition on Islam by relative non-experts, such as, pastors, laymen, and Muslim background believers.

John Wilson, an editor-at-large for *Christianity Today*, wrote a hopeful editorial less than two months after 9/11 that suggested that substantive knowledge about Islam is beginning to come to the level of popular instruction.<sup>2</sup> Wilson's hopes were not deferred. More knowledge has come to the evangelical populous about Islam. Certainly the books, articles, podcasts, and web pages mentioned in this thesis are evidence of the continued interest of evangelicals in Islam, Muslims, and the Muslim world.

The quality of this knowledge is a matter of opinion. Often, the richest education is a personal relationship. On this front, only some evangelicals benefit from personal interactions with the Muslim community. According to an estimate of the National

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<sup>1</sup> Judaism obviously holds a special place in the history and formation of Christianity. In depth knowledge of Christianity requires at least mild acquaintance with basic, ancient Jewish culture and law. Therefore, there is a long history of Christian literature and thought on Judaism. The only contemporary rival with Islam for evangelical interest is the "new atheism" movement. The "new atheism" Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens also perplexes and energizes evangelicals.

<sup>2</sup> John Wilson, "Discovering Islam: The Intellectual Challenge," *Books and Culture*, November 1, 2001, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/novemberweb-only/11-19/11.0.html>.

Association of Evangelicals, the majority of evangelical leaders have no personal contact with Muslims.<sup>3</sup>

This dearth of personal engagement contributes to the escalation of “Islam” in the evangelical mind. Lacking significant relational connection, evangelicals often defer to demographic data to form their conclusions. For evangelicals, demography often answers the “what” and “where” questions about Islam: what is the growth rate of Islam? What are the patterns in Muslim migration? What is the demographic profile of the average Muslim in America? Where do Muslims live in the world? Demography of the Muslim world rarely *by itself* answers the “why” questions: Why are Muslims moving to America? Why do Muslims get involved in government in the United States? Why is Islam growing so rapidly? For evangelicals, though, demography confirms their assumptions about Islam and Muslim: Islam has a grand, global agenda; Islam is a cosmic threat to Christianity; Islam and Christianity are the ultimate existential rivals for the souls of men.

Evangelical literature on Islam reflects anxiety and fervor about Islam. Convictions about the connections between the Devil and Islam, as well as the role of Islam and the Muslim world in the End Times contribute to this anxiety. Prophetic books leverage their predictions about the future to call evangelicals to action, and therefore, contribute to an activist impulse within American evangelicalism. This activist impulse

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<sup>3</sup> A February 2009, NAE Evangelical Leaders Survey asked: “Do you have a mosque in your neighborhood? Have you personally had a serious discussion with a Muslim in the past year?” In response 27% reported living or working in proximity of a mosque and 33% said they had a serious conversation with a Muslim. A large majority (73% and 67%) have no close contact with institutional Islam or individual Muslims. “Evangelical Leaders Survey: Minority have contact with Muslims,” *National Association of Evangelicals*, February 2009, <http://www.nae.net/index.cfm?FUSEACTION=editor.page&pageID=557&IDcategory=1>.

leads to political, prophetic, and restorative activity among evangelicals. Informational, apologetic, and missional books more clearly push a missionary agenda among Muslims. Informational books educate interested Christians about Islam and the different types of Muslims so that they can adequately evangelize Muslims. The apologetics books both explain Christianity and explain away Islam. The missional books tactically equip Christians to “reach Muslims with the Gospel.” In other words, the informational, apologetic, and missional books contribute to the “missional impulse” which manifests itself in evangelistic, dialogical, and educational activity.

### **Final Reflection**

Islam perplexes evangelical Christians. Perhaps like no other major world religion, Islam reveals the core convictions of evangelicalism. Since the first era of Islamic civilization, Christians have struggled to know, understand, and relate to Islam. One reason for this is that Islam is the only major world religion to appear after the formation of Christianity. Islam can uniquely, therefore, simultaneously attack the most precious doctrines of orthodox Christianity (the nature of Jesus, the cross, the nature of sin) as well as cherish much of the rest (the unity of God, the eternality of human souls). Another reason Islam perplexes Christians is nonreligious all together. Very rapidly, the original Muslim community evolved into an entire civilization. Christendom at that time had never faced a civilizational threat that was also so closely linked with a world religion. After its triumph within Rome, only internal forces posed serious threats against Christendom. Within a hundred years, Islam pierced the sacred expanse of Christendom,

and, alas, succeeded. Since that time, forces ostensibly under the banner of the abstraction called “Islam” forced Christendom to answer its polemical questions and respond with strength to its sociological, linguistic, civilizational, and theological accusations.

Since Christendom as a term emphasizes religious territoriality, the natural question to ask about Christendom-Islam relations is, “Which religion will win?” This question makes sense, at least on the level of sociology and history. But given the demise of Christendom in the West, in the sense of religious territoriality, the notion of competition between Islam and Christendom is not as pressing. Evangelical Christianity is not territorial. Thus, the question “who will win?” becomes irrelevant, distracting, and disadvantageous to the interests of both evangelical Christians and Muslims. After all, people in a competitive match do not “show their cards” to each other. They do not share secrets or advice. They do not cooperate. The singular objective is to “win.” There is, and will never be, any optimum solution to this dysfunction. This is the reality of *Christendom*-Islam relations.

But what about evangelical Christianity-Islam relations? Does being an evangelical make any difference in how one thinks about Islam? The assumption of this thesis is that being an evangelical does indeed make a difference.

In the first paragraph of the introduction to his seminal work on medieval Christian images of Islam, Norman Daniel makes one of the most profound observations in all the literature of Christian-Muslim relations:

The earliest Christian reactions to Islam were much the same as they have been until quite recently. The tradition has been continuous and it is still alive.

Naturally there has been variety within the wider unity of the tradition, and the European (and American) West has long had its own characteristic view, which was formed in the two centuries or so after 1100, and which has been modified only slowly since. One chief reason for continuity has been, not only the normal passage of ideas from one author to the next, but the constant nature of the problem. The points in which Christianity and Islam differ have not changed.<sup>4</sup>

Daniel's point is especially significant for evangelical Christians who desire something different than relational dysfunction with Muslims. The passage of time and the change of cultures have not, themselves, *significantly* changed the way that Christians think about Islam. If one were to compare my analytical results with those of Daniel, Southern, and the others that I reference in my literature review, they will find that my conclusions are not all together different.

This paper shows that what one thinks about Islam and why indicates particular theological, cultural, and even sociological orientations. Islam, in this way, is a helpful analytical reference point to understand American evangelicals: they are threatened by demographic growth of other religions; they are mostly pragmatic in the way they think about other religions; they live in tension between their missional and activist characteristics; and they are existentially challenged by Islam.

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<sup>4</sup> Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: the Making of an Image*, reprint. (Oneworld, 1993), 11.

## APPENDIX

<b>Apologetic</b>	<b>Missional</b>	<b>Prophetic</b>	<b>Informational</b>
Cooper, 2002	Cate and D., 2003	Alexander, 2005	Alam, 2006
Geisler, 2002	Curry and M., 2002	Back and B., 2007	Ankerberg and C., 2008
Gilchrist, 2002	Frangipane, 2005	Fortner, 2006	Ankerberg and C., 2009
Masri, 2006	Garrison, 2004	Hagee, 2001	Ankerberg, W., and B., 2008
Moucarry, 2002	Mallouhi, 2004	Hagee, 2003	Beverley, 2001
Rhodes, 2002	Masri, 2008	Hagee, 2007	Braswell, 2005
Schmidt, 2004	McCurry, 2001	Hanegraaf, 2007	Caner, 2004
Shahid, 2005	McDowell, 1999	Hitchcock, 2002	Chapman, 2008
	Musk, 2008	Hitchcock, 2006	Companjen, 2007
	Parshall, 2003	Hunt, 2005	Crandall, 2008
	Parshall, 2007	Jeffrey, 2002	Dardess, 2005
	Saffee, 1999	Jeffrey, 2006	Gabriel, 2002
	Sinclair, 2006	Lindsey, 2002	Gabriel, 2003
	Steve, 2007	Livingston, 2004	Gabriel, 2006
	Strong and P., 2007	Manty, 2007	Gabriel, 2007
	Woodberry, 2008	Miller, 2004	Garlow, 2005
	Zahniser, 2008	Otis, 1991	George, 2002
		Richardson, 2006	MacArthur, 2001
		Rosenberg, 2008	McCullar, 2008
		Skolfield, 2007	Pawson, 2003
		Stice, 2005	Pearse, 2004
		Stone, 2009	Price, 2001
			Riddell and C., 2003
			Sadeghian, 2006
			Sheikh and S., 2003
			Wagner, 2004
			Ward, 2009
			Winn, 2004
<b>Apologetic</b>	Tanagho, 2004		Caner and C., 2003
	Zaka and Coleman, 2004		Richardson, 2003
			Sproul, 2003
<b>Missional</b>			Adeney, 2002
			Andrew and J., 2005
			Andrew and J., 2007
			Beverley, 1997
			Caner and C., 2002
			Caner and C., 2003
			Chapman, 2008
			Cooper and M., 2004
			Elass, 2004
			Jabbour, 2008
			Love, 2003
			Mallouhi, 2002
			Musk, 2004
			Musk, 2005
			Poston and E., 2000
			Safa, 1997
			Safa, 2006
			Sookhdeo, 2005
			Swartley and C.P., 2005
			Taber, 2004

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## VITA

Joseph Shaw was born in San Jose, Costa Rica and has lived since then in the Dominican Republic, India, Morocco, and Lebanon, as well as various places in the United States. He is currently the Minister of International Mission at The Austin Stone Community Church, where he oversees the church's global outreach. In 2007, he worked at the Arab NGO Network for Development in Beirut, Lebanon, where he contributed to a book entitled, *The Arab Region and Trade Liberalization Policies*. He has a Bachelor of Arts in Middle East Studies and International Relations from the University of Arkansas.

Permanent Address: 8605 Talyne Chaise Cir. Unit B

Austin, TX 78729

This thesis was typed by the author.